

# Lutheran<sup>TM</sup>

## L I F E

FALL 2019

*Inside this issue:*

*Vocation:  
how you are  
called by  
God in all  
aspects of  
your life*



# WHAT IS VOCATION?

A kindergartner works on an assignment entitled “What I want to be when I grow up.”

A recent graduate steps out on her own for the first time, wondering what’s next.

A new parent re-evaluates his employment situation.

A retiree explores how to spend her days.

Have you ever found yourself in situations like these, wondering what you should be doing or how you should be living? These kinds of questions can follow us throughout the various seasons of life. We pray, “God, what am I supposed to do here? Just tell me what to do and how to live.”

Jesus gives us a framework for what we’re supposed to do. He tells us the greatest commandment is to love God, with the second like it: to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:35–40). One way we can love God is by doing what He commands (1 John 5:3). This series of articles looks at what it means to follow Jesus’ command to love our neighbor and how we can actually do this in the various parts of our life.

Considering how we can love our neighbor is the basis for the term *vocation*. Vocation, or calling, is doing the work God has put in front of us to do for the benefit of our neighbor in every station and place we find ourselves throughout our lives.

The apostle Paul gives us a clear starting point as we consider our vocations. He writes in his letter to the Ephesians:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (EPHESIANS 2:8–10)”

Since we know it is by the grace of God we have been saved, we are freed from committing our lives to doing good to win God’s favor. We already have God’s favor because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our salvation is secure through faith in Christ. With this as our foundation, we can focus our attention on our purpose in this world.

What have we been put here to do?

Paul says in verse 10 that we are God’s workmanship, put here to carry out the good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do. We don’t need to do good works to earn God’s favor. Instead, we do them for our neighbor, the people around us.

Cue vocation.

Martin Luther is famously quoted as saying, “God does not need our good works but our neighbors do.” Luther’s quote about our neighbors needing to be loved and served is carried out through your various vocations, depending on where you find yourself. ‡



# HOW DO I FIND

“Vocation is exercised in relationships,” explains Dr. Angus Menuge in his book *The Lutheran Difference: Christian Vocation*.

When considering your vocations, you need look no further than your relationships with the people around you. Start with those you’re in closest physical proximity to. Consider your familial vocations as a sibling, parent, or cousin. Then, reflect on your interactions and activities outside the home as friend, co-worker, or classmate. Finally, assess your place in society as a citizen, employee, or licensed driver. Each of these vocations may ask different things of you, but all have the same underlying goal: to love your neighbor.

Considering your vocations both frees you and gives purpose you as you consider your life here on earth. With your identity in Christ secure, you are free to focus your time and attention on caring for the people around you. Because God has intentionally put you in relationships with others, you can find purpose and fulfillment in carrying out the good works God has given to you to do—by loving and serving those around you.

May the Holy Spirit open your eyes to the needs of your neighbor and fill you with His love so you can care for others out of the same care you yourself receive from your heavenly Father.

Use this chart to help you consider the relationships in your life and how you can serve the people God has placed in your life.



## Next Step

Take a look at the chart you filled out. Whom did you write down? How might God be leading you to help meet the practical needs of the people you’ve identified? ‡

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# MY VOCATIONS?



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# VOCATION



## IT STARTS AT HOME

As you consider your vocations, it's appropriate to start with where you live—right in your very living room. Take a moment to consider whom you live with. Perhaps a spouse, child, parent, or friend. What are practical ways you can love and serve those under the same roof?

Vocational work at home means recognizing the role you play in your family unit. Your very presence in this home holds the potential for you to carry out the good works God has prepared for you to do right here.

It means being generous when your brother wants the last cookie and considerate when your housemate

picks the movie. It means being patient when your child is behind on doing the laundry and slow to speak when your spouse just needs you to sit and listen. It means keeping family members in your prayers and encouraging them in the faith.

Sometimes, though, we might think our vocation—especially at home—is not as important or significant as another vocation outside the home. Don't believe those lies!

Luther consistently lifts up familial vocations to equal significance (if not of greater significance!) as those of seemingly holier or more socially appealing vocations.

*“Every person surely has a calling. While attending to it he serves God. A king serves God when he is at pains to look after and govern his people. So do the mother of a household when she tends her baby, the father of a household when he gains a livelihood by working, and a pupil when he applies himself diligently to his studies. . . . Therefore, it is a great wisdom when a human being does what God commands and earnestly devotes himself to his vocation without taking into consideration what others are doing.”\**

Resist the temptation to compare the vocational work you’ve been given to that of others. Rather, joyfully go about these callings at home, knowing you are carrying out the work God has given you to do. You are where you are supposed to be. †

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## *But what if I’m . . .*

### A SINGLE PERSON?

Whether you physically live with others or not, you are connected to a family unit. Who are the members of your family, whether by blood or by choice? Who has God put in your life to walk alongside? Lean into these relationships, recognizing the value you play in one another’s lives.

Thinking about those around you and feeling short on meaningful connections? Talk to your pastor or other church workers about ways you can more intentionally serve members of your church family.

### A STAY-AT-HOME PARENT?

Martin Luther exclaims, “But this at least all married people should know. They can do no better work and do nothing more valuable either for God, for Christendom, for all the world, for themselves, and for their children than to bring up their children well.” \*\*

The people to serve are right in front of you: the screaming infant and messy toddler, the budding adolescent and the growing scholar. You have the incredible work of guiding a child in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6). What an opportunity to nurture your children in the faith!

### A GRANDPARENT?

What an honor to see your children now parent their own children. What a joy to build relationships with your grandchildren! How can you best serve your adult children as they parent? How can you best serve your grandchildren as they grow and learn?

Your role in their lives matters. Your silent prayers for them matter. Your faithful example of a person committed to life in Christ matters—so much. Stay the course. God has work for you to do here.

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# MANY PARTS,



# ONE BODY

Just as we have vocations at home, we also have vocations among our church family as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

St. Paul gives us imagery of a body to portray how each one of us has a specific role to play in the church. As we work together, play our part, and honor one another, we function as one—with Christ as our head.

In church, we celebrate the diversity of the vocational gifts given to each person. The church is made up of different people with different vocations that all work together to create one body of Christ. Paul celebrates the diversity of church vocations by comparing the church to a body, with each person representing a different body part. He writes:

*If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?*

*But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. (1 CORINTHIANS 12:17–20)*

There are many parts, yet one body. There are different roles at church and yet one church. This is how God has arranged it.

Paul continues in verse 28 to explain how God has appointed some to be apostles and prophets, some to be teachers and administrators. We are not all pastors or elders, but each of us has a role to play.



What's your role? Take a moment to consider what role(s) you have at church.

Vocation even goes beyond the work you do. It includes your very presence in relation to others. Your presence at church is part of fulfilling your vocation as a member of the Body of Christ. Even through the simple act of coming to church and sitting in your pew (perhaps, the exact same pew every week!), you are an encouragement and example to those around you. Similarly, your absence at church is an absence to the body; it makes it incomplete.

Feeling like your role isn't as important as that of your pastor or church worker? Or, conversely, that your vocation is more important than the elderly widow or wiggly baby? Paul has something to say about both thoughts.

*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor. (vv. 21–23)*

Did you catch that? Those we consider weaker or of less honor are actually indispensable and held with greater honor! How can that be?

Because "God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another" (vv. 24–25).

God ascribes equal honor and importance to all members of the Body. Each person is carrying out his or her vocation; each is walking in the good works God has prepared for him or her to do. THAT is worthy of our honor.

This is a two-fold lesson for us:

1

Our vocations in the church matter. The role you play is of significance and worth. Let us cheerfully fulfill our churchly vocations, knowing they have been given to us by God for the benefit of the Body.

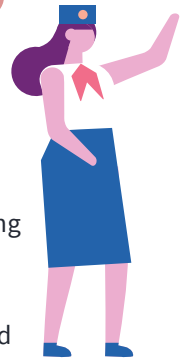
2

We each play a different vocation. Play yours and honor others. The whole body is not an eye, just as the whole church is not a single church worker. Honor and respect the vocations of others rather than dismissing or envying them.



What do you most struggle with: feeling insignificant at church or looking down on others? Who at church has a different vocational responsibility than yours? How could you encourage those people in their vocation this week? What would it look like to invest your time and energy to build up the Body at church? ‡

# “So what do you do?”



This common get-to-know-you question helps break the ice when meeting a new person. It's often meant to lead into a conversation about work and employment.

“I've been a grade-school teacher for 15 years. And you?”

“I'm an electrical engineer.”

Learning about someone's work gives us the first glimpse into who they are.

Did you know that God cares about your work? And not just church work but ALL work. It's a part of God's original design for humans. In Genesis, we read,

*So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

**(GENESIS 1:27–28)**

Being created in God's image includes being created to work, even as God is at work in creating the world. In this passage, God gives Adam and Eve direction regarding their relationship with the rest of creation. Humans are to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every other living thing on the earth. In other words, humans are created to work!

Even more, this command was given before the fall into sin. Work is a part of God's perfect design for creation and part of how humans are to live life.

It can be hard to imagine work before the fall—before the ground was cursed and work was met with thorns, thistles, and toil (Genesis 3:17–19). Our relationship with work isn't always one of great fulfillment and unity with creation. Sometimes, it can seem boring or mundane.

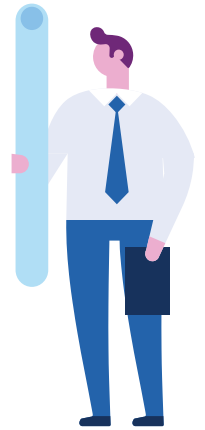
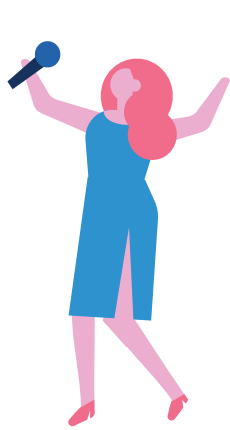
Wherever we find ourselves in relation to others, there is purpose-filled, life-giving, vocational work to do.

I can guarantee you that there are co-workers around you who are desperate for the love of God you possess.

There's a lonely person looking for meaningful connection. There's a spouse who needs accountability to remain faithful to his or her wedding vows. There's a parent who needs encouragement to be more present at home with her family. There's a boss who needs the reminder his self-worth isn't based on the amount of revenue his team generates.

The workplace is rife with vocational opportunities to care for the people you come in contact with. Projects and deadlines will come and go, but the people and relationships remain. How can you reorient your view of the workplace to prioritize your interactions

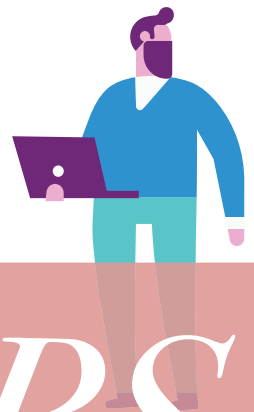
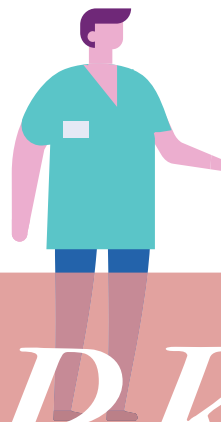
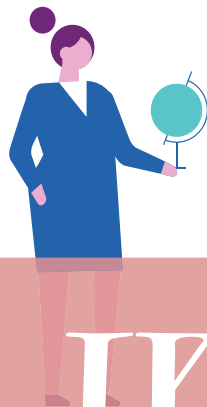
# CARING FOR



with people over the sum of their work outputs?

Caring for people as people, before caring about the work they produce, goes a long way in serving and treating your co-workers as Jesus does. For Christ, in His loving mercy, counted us worthy of His time and affection regardless of the work we do for Him; He values us because we are the ones for whom He died. As image bearers, may we also treat our co-workers with honor and respect as fellow brothers and sisters that God loves.

Imagine how living this way could change your workplace environment. How might God be leading you to care for co-workers out of the love Christ has shown you? †



# CO-WORKERS

# CITIZEN & SAINT



It's no secret that we live in a politically charged climate in the United States. In the midst of charged conversations and political divides, it can be incredibly difficult to know what it means to be a Christian in this land and where our vocational intersection of being a Christian and being an American meet.

To begin, it's helpful to recognize that as Christians we are citizens of two kingdoms: the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom. The heavenly kingdom is centered on grace, forgiveness, and eternal life. Here, Christ reigns. This kingdom will have no end. We're also citizens of the earthly kingdom, where we abide by the rules and leaders of this land, recognizing that God has established all authorities under heaven to rule and to reign (Romans 13). We are equally and fully members of both kingdoms, but living in each may require different vocational tasks of us.

Consider your relationship with the community around you locally, regionally, and nationally. Being an active citizen starts at the same place all other vocations start: with Christ's command to love your neighbor as yourself. This includes how you interact with those who have different political views than you, the leaders of your community and land, as well as those who are marginalized, under-served, or overlooked. In each instance, we are called to love and serve those around us. As a citizen, this may include things like abiding by the laws, voting, paying taxes, writing elected officials, and being engaged in civic affairs.

# What does the vocation of a citizen of the United States look like?

In his book *Clearly Christian: Following Jesus in an Age of Confusion*, Rev. Trevor Sutton provides a helpful framework for how to get started as an active citizen. Here are three steps:

1

**Take Time to Learn.** Being an active citizen means being informed. It means living with our eyes and ears open to the cries of our community. Considering the amount of misinformation and biased sources, it also means doing our research and being a critical learner. Recognize where sources are coming from, and seek to discern hidden agendas, misinformation, or biased reporting that can come from either side of the political divide. Learn the facts, listen to the stories, pray for discernment, and allow God to break your heart for the issues that also break His.

2

**Know your Scope.** We have access to more information now than at any other point in history. It is easy to become overwhelmed. The 24/7 headlines of crises and injustices can be unbearable at times. Narrow your scope so you can dive deeper into learning about specific issues instead of trying to stay informed about every issue. What is going on in your community that ties to your other vocations? Where might there be overlap to get involved in your community that may also benefit neighbors you've identified in your vocational web (see p. 5)?

3

**Do Something.** Once you've done your research and determined your scope, do something. Living our vocation as citizens puts us in a hands-on, action-oriented posture that seeks to care for those around us. Jump in and do the work of caring for those in your community. Go to the town hall meeting, start a nonprofit, run for office, pray for the needs you see.

There are so many ways you can carry out your vocation of citizen. Instead of being immobilized by the sheer weight of needs in your community, choose to dive in where you are and in a way that you can best serve. Regardless of how you serve, remember that we Christians are called to treat people differently. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. What would it look like for you to start being an active citizen by first praying for those you disagree with most? to start from a posture of seeking to listen and understand another's point of view, even

if the person never asks to hear your side. to be an ambassador of Christ's love, even in the hard places. What would it look like to pray for our leaders and trust God's provision working in and through them?

May we use these vocational opportunities to trust ever more in our God, the Almighty King and Everlasting Ruler, that He would align our hearts to His and enable us to serve in our communities according to His purposes. †

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# Rest,



After all this talk about the responsibility and importance of our vocations at home, church, work, and community, we might begin to wonder, Does God care about what I do for fun? YES! He does. There is vocational work for you to do even in your leisure activities.

Let's review. How are vocations defined? By our relationships with others. Wherever you find yourself in relation to someone else—in the studio, on the field, or at the coffee shop—God has prepared good works for you to do here!

Our leisure activities give us a great opportunity to share God's love as we form meaningful connections and build trusting relationships with those around us. We can model God's love by the way we interact with and respect others. We may also have opportunities to tell friends about God's love when they ask us questions about why we live the way we do and why we treat them with such care.

But even if your leisure activities never lead to conversations about Jesus, God still cares about your leisure time. Why? Because God cares about you. And God cares about rest. He cares about rest so much so that He chose to model it for us in His work of creating the world:

*“And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done.”*

**(GENESIS 2:2)**

The almighty, all-powerful God of the universe took time to rest. Certainly, He didn't need to. Our God never grows tired or weary. Yet He rests to model for us what it looks like to take time away from our daily work.

Just as God created humans to work, He also created humans to rest. We know part of resting specifically includes taking time to rest in Christ (as we find in the Third Commandment). But rest can also include our leisure activities.

You don't need to over-spiritualize your leisure activities in order for God to “approve” of them. You don't need to shy away from heated competition on the field or only create “religious” art for it to be worthy of your time as a Christian. There is freedom in Christ. There is rest in Christ. Part of your vocation as a Christian is enjoying the gifts He's given you, and those around you, by resting.

# *Reset, Connect*

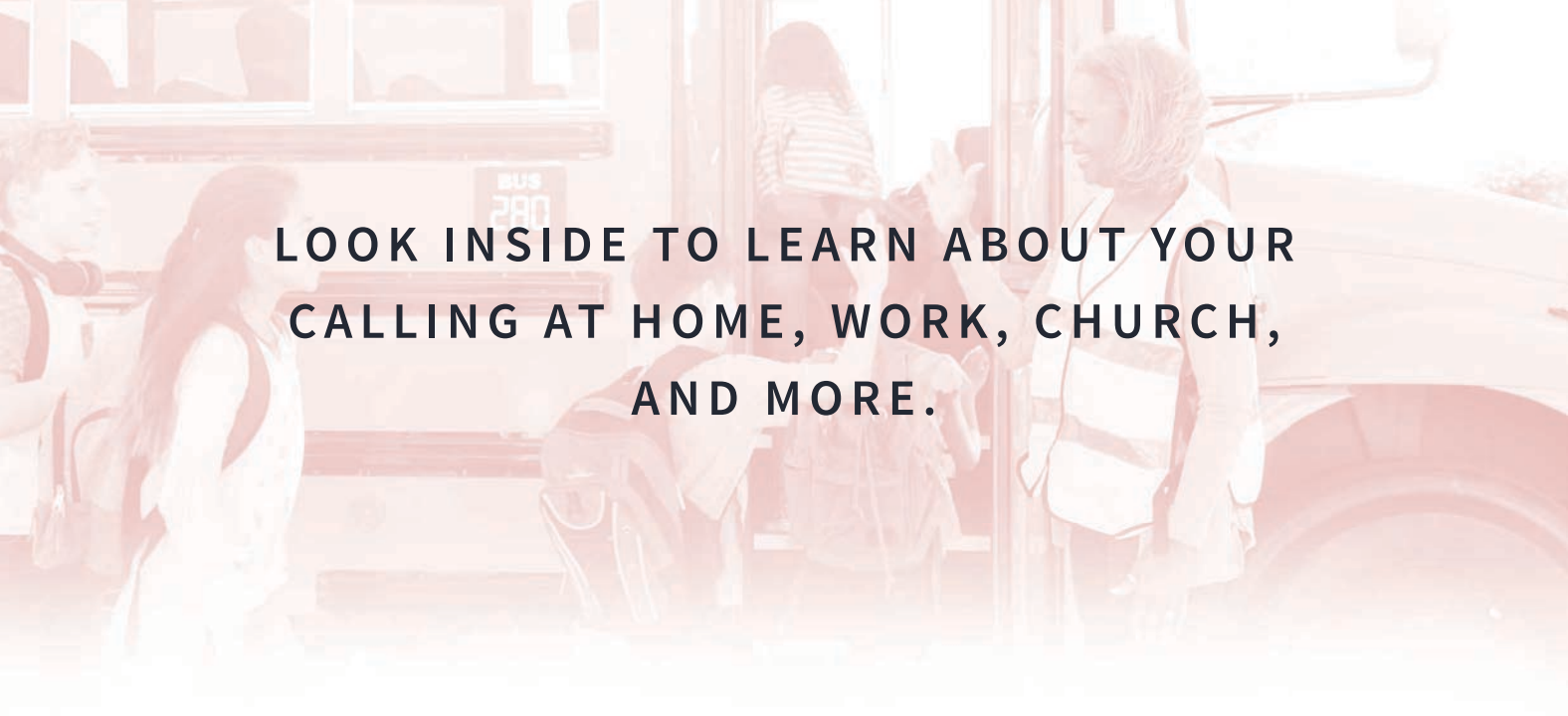
God is with you in your rest. His Spirit is present in you and ready to lead you in the work He has planned for you. Sometimes, that “work” means resting. Taking time to rest and enjoy is a witness to those around you. By doing so, you’re acknowledging you’re more than your contributions to an ongoing work.

Stopping to enjoy other things shows that we trust God will continue to provide for us even when we stop working toward that. The world won’t stop spinning because we stop working. It is a testament that God is higher and more holy than us. We rest

because He commands us to. We rest because it’s part of what it means to be human. We rest because it’s a gift and promised blessing in Christ.

Go and enjoy! Play, sing, create, grow, connect. And rest. This, too, is what God has prepared for you. ‡





LOOK INSIDE TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR  
CALLING AT HOME, WORK, CHURCH,  
AND MORE.

# Lutheran<sup>TM</sup> L I F E



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