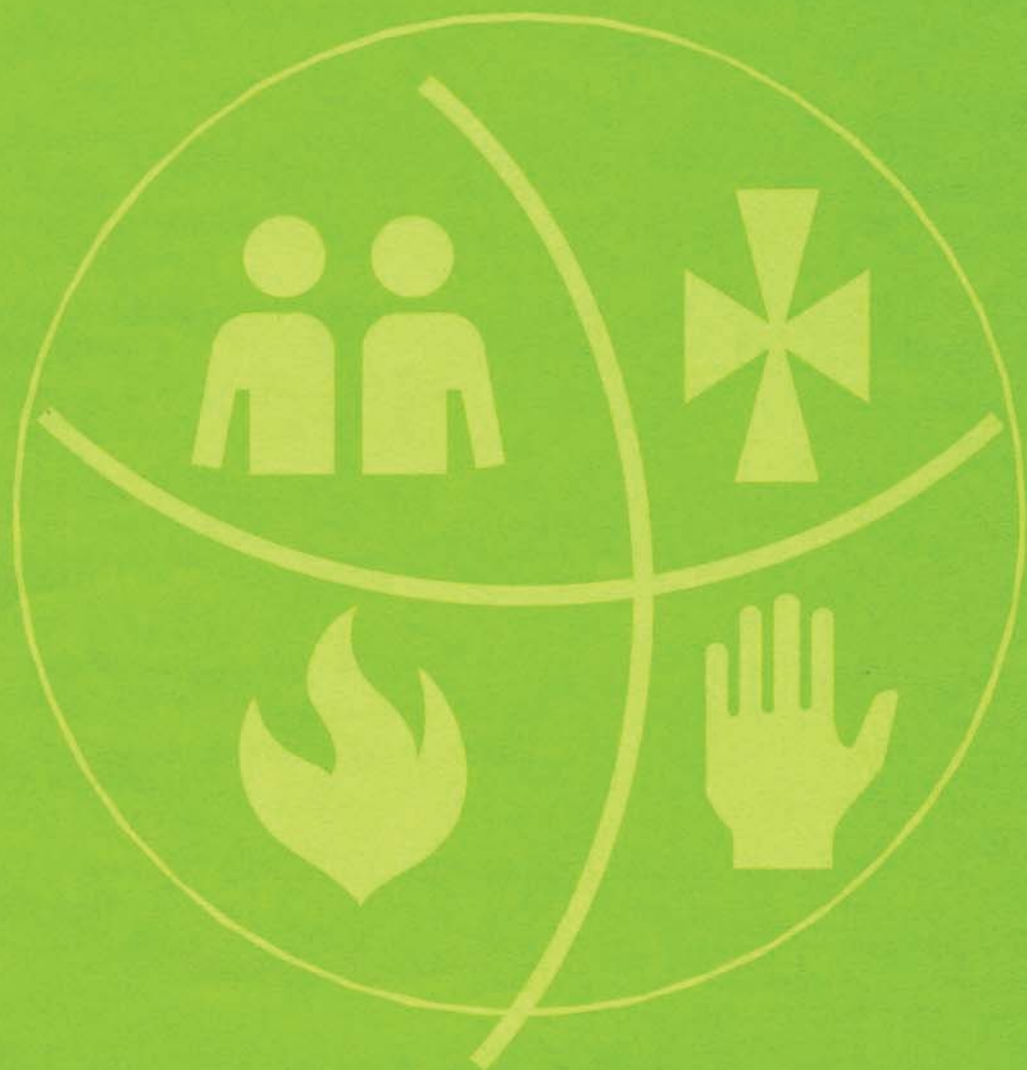


2005 SUMMER  
VOCATION INSTITUTE  
JOURNAL



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# ***INTRODUCING THE AUGSBURG SUMMER VOCATION INSTITUTE JOURNAL***

During the week of June 12–17, 2005, 21 students attended the Summer Vocation Institute (SVI) at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minn. The week included academic, experiential, and emotional forays into themes surrounding the theme of “Vocation.” Students spent three hours each day learning about the theological foundations of a Lutheran understanding of vocation. Their academic guides were Dr. Mark Tranvik, Augsburg professor of religion and director of Augsburg’s Exploring Our Gifts: Reconnecting Faith, Life, and Vocation program; and Ross Murray, SVI program director. Tranvik and Murray led the students through a life without vocation, Luther and vocation, responding to vocation, and action in the world. In addition, participants learned the basics of research writing, explored the Skyway community of Minneapolis, and visited congregations living out vocation in their contexts. Participants also partook in devotions and worship, led by Augsburg students.

As a result of their learning and experiences, the participants wrote essays reflecting on theology, life, and vocation. The papers you will read cover a variety of topics. Students were not limited in subject matter; the only stipulation was to connect their essay to the theme of vocation. Many essays reflect on particular aspects of the SVI. Others take ideas discussed at the SVI and add a layer of research over the conversation. Still others take the readers through a personal reflection of a specific vocational call from God.

The idea for the SVI comes from a need to provide rigorous theological education for today’s youth. While relationships and entertainment are both vital tools, young people also are eager to learn about faith, life, and God. The participants who participated in the SVI were identified as youth with gifts for theological inquiry (as you will soon read). They came to the SVI with ideas and questions already churning. Experiences like the SVI will help young people to articulate what they believe, and why they believe what they do. It gives them permission to have theological imagination. Each day of the SVI was filled with lively debate and discussion. Youth were clearly impacted by the ideas from one another, as well as from the leaders.

This journal is an opportunity to give theological voice to those youth. As you read these essays, imagine what the young people in your own community may think about vocation, faith, life, and God. These essays may be an opportunity to begin a theological conversation with a young person in your midst. Keep your ears open—you may discover a theologian you had not noticed before.

While the papers had a limited amount of editing, care was taken to preserve the voice of the youth in each essay. Biblical references will vary, as each youth used a favorite translation. You will also see a variety of writing styles, each particular to the youth who wrote the essay. In some cases, language changes were made. However, the papers appear largely as they were received in August 2005.

Augsburg is interested in continuing exploring theology with youth. Plans are already underway for the next Summer Theology Institute. You may notice the shift in title; moving to the term “theology” allows us to explore a wide range of ideas and themes, while still relating to the idea of vocation. If you are interested in nominating a young person to be a part of the Summer Theology Institute, please contact Ross Murray at Augsburg to ask about the plans for the next summer.

Until then, please enjoy the following thoughts on vocation!

Ross Murray  
Program Director:  
Summer Vocation Institute



# A CHANGING VOCATION

by Ruth Senum, Maple Grove, Minn.

*"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing one another in love."<sup>1</sup>*

As a follower of God and Jesus, I feel it very important to do what God *calls* me to do, what he intended my purpose for living to be: my vocation. Most people go through life without even thinking about whether or not they are doing what God wanted. I know that God has given me many gifts, and so I want to use them in the way He intended. I'm not quite sure, however, what God's purpose was in giving me these gifts. I'm not even sure what these gifts are! From talking with other people and looking through the Bible, I've found that other people have similar questions and thoughts.

The Bible constantly references God telling others what to do, and how they react. One example is the story of Moses, a young man who God used to help free the Israelites from Egypt. "Now, when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said, 'I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.' But Moses said to the Lord, 'Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?' Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.'"<sup>2</sup> Moses was unsure that he was the right one for the job, but God gave him the gifts to do His word.

Another example is Noah, who had a very farfetched task to complete, but was helped by God. "I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and sons and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you."<sup>3</sup> Noah was given the materials and talents needed to build the ark, even though he was skeptical of the idea at first. God gave him a task that wasn't impossible, but one that needed assurance and complete faith in God to fulfill.

I also asked others about their opinions on vocation and if it can change. I interviewed Rikki Starich, a junior at Augsburg; Susan McKenzie, a youth minister at my church; and Neil Howes, a retired engineer and also my grandfather. Rikki has changed her mind several times as to what she wants to major in. Even after college she has decided to do something other than work as a reporter; instead, she wants to work for the Lutheran Volunteer Corp. She believes that her vocation is always changing and will continue to change for the rest of her life. Susan went through college with a major in retail merchandising, but due to a lay-off, she applied to be a youth minister at my church. She now touches the lives of youth in my congregation, something that she had no training for but has plenty of gifts from God to use. My grandfather felt God's calling from a young age; he always knew he'd become an engineer. He's been an engineer his whole life, even

1 Ephesians 4:1-2; Teen Devotional Bible. New International Version. Zondervan, 1999

2 Exodus 6:28-30 and 7:1; Teen Devotional Bible. New International Version. Zondervan, 1999

3 Genesis 6:17-19; Teen Devotional Bible. New International Version. Zondervan, 1999



through retirement. The only thing that has changed through the years is learning about computers, and although he's retired, my grandpa is still willing to serve in God's name, doing many volunteer jobs that require the his special gift. He doesn't think that his vocation will drastically change any time soon, unlike Susan's and Rikki's. Also, I feel that Susan and Rikki are trying to discover multiple ways to make a difference in someone's life through God. As Rikki said, "It's discovering the problems out there and figuring out which ones I can make a difference with ... How I can help those people." I believe that God has a purpose for everyone, multiple purposes, and that it's our duty while on earth to discover and fulfill those vocations.

In my own experience, I know that my vocation has changed and will change again many times in my life. When I attended the Summer Vocation Institute in 2004, I came to the camp thinking that I would go to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and become a nurse or doctor. I knew that it would be a lot of schooling, but the job looked secure and would pay well. While at Augsburg, though, I really felt at home, and I fell in love with the campus. After taking several "gifts" tests, I figured out that I should choose a job because I want to do it and have the gifts for it. Being a doctor or nurse was something I could do with a lot of hard work, but was something that I didn't really have a passion for. I realized that I love little kids and I love teaching, so instead of going into health care, I want to major in education. God is calling me to do what he gave me gifts for, patience with little kids and teaching, and what I enjoy, helping others. I believe that my vocation right now is to be a teacher, but I know that it could change. God has a plan for me, and no matter how long it takes, I'll figure out what it is.

In conclusion, I found that the word *vocation* has many meanings. God calls everyone to do some task on earth, but not every calling is the same. Some people seem to have more talent than others, and some seem to have multiple gifts. Others seem to know the goal God wants them to achieve. To God, it doesn't matter; he already has a plan for us. It's just a matter of having trust and keeping our ears open to listen to His word. The time we spend on earth is limited. I believe that we should spend this time wisely by doing the simple tasks God lays out for us. "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."



# VOCATION IN THE CITIES

by Kaitlin Barrett, Plymouth, Minn.

As I sit trying to concentrate on a paper about vocation, I find myself too busy trying to discover my own vocation! With school and jobs, non-profits and sports, how do you find time to stop and listen to God? What is God calling you to do? What is your purpose? Well, if you think you're going to be exposed to the meaning of life ... this paper won't do it. However, you will be exposed to Lutheranism and vocation through the eyes of pastors, friends of the church, and the founder of grace through faith, Martin Luther. This paper will reveal, through interviews and research, the differences between the modern and beginning church along with a comparison of Minnesotan urban and suburban churches.

Martin Luther expressed his thoughts on vocation as a new model for the church. To understand this paper you must first know the definition of vocation. Vocation, *vocare* in Latin, is often defined as a profession. Luther defined it as a calling unique to Christians, and was the first to refer to vocation in the secular world. Vocation isn't about doing something, instead, it's about *being* something. Prior to Luther, vocation was God's call to the most spiritual posts as monks and priests, but Luther felt that God called everyone. "It is a pure invention that Pope, Bishop, Priests, and Monks are called the Spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one is intimidated by it and for this reason, all Christians are truly of the Spiritual estate and there is no difference among them except by office ... We are all consecrated priests through baptism." (Luther, "To The Christian Nobility of the German Nation")

Many people define themselves by their professions. A lawyer may think he is better than a plumber because he makes more money, but this is a false belief. As long as you are serving others, no job is holier or closer to God than the next. The most basic vocation of all is to love God and serve your neighbor. Lutheran theology splits God's activity into two realms: The spiritual (Bible and Sacrament), and the earthly (vocation). God uses us to share our faith in the secular world. Many who are saved feel God through the spiritual realm. But, if we are to share the good news of Christ, the easiest way is through interaction with our friends and co-workers in the earthly realm of vocation. In the theology of Luther's time, ordination divided Christian status. Luther stressed that baptism marks a calling believing and devotion to spiritual things considered "more holy." For this reason we say that we *are* baptized, not that we *were* baptized. "See to at first of all that you believe in Christ and are baptized. Afterward, see to your vocation. I am called to be a preacher. Now when I preach I perform a holy work that is pleasing to God. If you are a father or mother, believe in Jesus Christ and so you will be a holy father and a holy mother. Pay attention to the early years of your children, let them pray, and discipline and spank them. Oversee the running of the household and the preparation of meals. These things are none other than holy works to which you have been called. That means they are your holy life and are a part of God's word and your vocation." (Luther, Sermon in 1534)

"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.” (Luther, Lecture on Genesis 17:9, “You Shall Keep my Covenant”) Luther divides vocation on three understandings of creation: Creation is good; God is always present; and God works through discernible means. God states many times in Genesis that he saw what he was creating as good. God is always changing the world through seasons and sunsets. God heals, gives us our daily bread, forgives, protects, and so much more. God didn’t stop after the first week of creation. God uses us through our vocations to care and provide for the world.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America is popular and a faith cornerstone. In a 1993 statement, *Together for Ministry*, these words are declared: “God calls all Christians to a life of vocation. To have a vocation means to live out one’s call. For Christians, that call is answered in the structures of daily life—family, work, state, service to the neighbor, care of creation—as the setting in which to live out their identity in the Gospel.” This statement attempted to bridge the divide of Sunday and Monday. In the ELCA’s “Model Constitution for Congregations,” the church is exhorted to “nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.”

I conducted a series of interviews with staff members from both Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley and Redeemer Lutheran in Minneapolis. The staff was chosen so as to receive the widest range of answers. Some work with children, some with young adults. Still others work with older members or are part of the music ministry. The first and most basic question I asked everyone was what vocation meant to him or her. I was disappointed to find that half the respondents answered, whether consciously or not, that vocation meant a calling. God was completely left out. I was hoping for a response that said that vocation was answering God’s call—being where He wants me, doing what He wants me to do, and becoming who He wants me to become.

Sharry Hosfield, works in the children’s ministry at Calvary Lutheran. She feels called to advocate and work with children. In this ministry, they talk about God’s calling for them. Children were created unique and can explore their gifts with assistance from community helpers such as missionaries as well as through Bible stories like Jesus and the children along with creation and David and Goliath.

Kevin Johnson is the pastor for children, youth, and family at Calvary as well as the Vine pastor for young adults. He lives out his vocation as a pastor and writer but also as a family man and good neighbor. He feels God is calling Calvary to help members find the smaller more specialized callings within the larger. He personally helps people find their calling through LifeKeys, a program that helps participants discover who they are, why they’re here, and what they do best. He does admit that in sermons he doesn’t specifically use the word “call” or “vocation,” but he teaches about finding God’s will in your life. He worries that people become overwhelmed finding their vocation, asserting that it is through God’s design that we are called. Lastly, Pastor Johnson also talked about “Greyhound vs. Amtrak” theology. We have one ultimate calling and many ways to get there such as by bus (Greyhound). Statements like, “Oh, I fell off the track and am derailed forever,” exemplify the Amtrak theory. Pastor Johnson prefers the Greyhound theory. God can redeem even our



stupidities and mistaken calls to bring us closer to Him.

Musician extraordinaire Dan Oie is the mastermind behind the songs at Calvary. He lives out his vocation by developing his musical skills and talents and using them to the best of his abilities. He feels Calvary is called to follow the Scripture, baptize and administer Holy Communion along with following the Great Commission. He feels the ELCA is called to be a community of faithful believers of Christ. Modern thought and ideology distracts from the caring and loving instructions of Jesus. He thinks Luther would challenge us to not separate secular and sacred values or jobs but to find the spiritual meaning in everything we do. Through his ministry, people can prepare themselves for their vocation through traditional hymns like "Take My Life That I May Be" (LBW #406), "Spirit of God Descend upon My Heart" (LBW #486), and "Be Though My Vision" (WOV #776). Contemporary selections include "Sanctuary" by Thompson and Scruggs, "Take My Life and Let It Be" by Chris Tomlin, and "Show Me Your Ways" by Russell Frager. Music helps people find their calling by leading them to believe in Jesus, to surrender and commit to Him, to praise, pray, and communicate with God, along with teach and reflect on beauty and creativity in all art forms.

Senior Pastor Steve Dornbusch's original plans did not include the ministry. While in college for aerospace technology, he felt that God was calling him to be a pastor. (Bummer for NASA but a big hooray for Calvary!) He feels God is calling Calvary to concentrate on discipleship—growing deeper, being accountable for your faith, and connecting through small groups. He also feels that the Church has a similar feel to that of early day Luther's but that the issues are different. We are still justified by grace through faith. Pastor Dornbusch hopes that Luther would be pleased with Calvary's variety in music but would look down on our lack of the use of the catechism and family teaching. This senior pastor wants to see the ELCA support churches. He feels there is little emphasis on the Great Commission of Matthew 28. When asked if Calvary Lutheran Church would leave the synod like so many others have, the reply was hesitant but not hopeful. If rulings were not in line with Calvary's views, there is a definite possibility that Calvary would be joining the ranks of other churches that have already left the ELCA. The last words on vocation from the most well known pastor at Calvary were a friendly reminder that everyone has a vocation and it is about your attitude and the way you listen that God calls.

Pastor Kelly Chatman is one of the few staff members at Redeemer Lutheran in Minneapolis. This church of less than 100 is led by this man of faith whose first encounter with the idea of vocation was in Washington, D.C., while serving the homeless. The more he served, the more he understood. He feels his church is called to be a multi-ethnic, multi-faceted congregation working toward a new freedom. His congregation is diverse and very open with the community putting on many programs and additional services that fit the needs of its diverse congregation, including a hip hop worship service. Music is important to this pastor but not as important as the unity of the ELCA. Pastor Kelly feels the ELCA needs him and that he would never consider leaving at such a critical time.



# SERVING THROUGH HEALING

by Ashlee Nicole Lang, Baden, Pa.

Martin Luther saw that people make up a “priesthood of all believers.” He also maintained that everyone has a calling, an urgent invitation, to help others and serve the Lord. Everyone is a child of God; each one has unique gifts and talents. Putting those blessings to good use means exploring the idea of vocation. One particular vocation option that appeals to many is the field of medicine. Certain gifts and attributes are helpful in this profession, and the Bible offers numerous examples of medicine’s power and potential. It is worth pondering the human factor that makes saving lives through medicine possible, because Jesus is the ultimate healer and performer of miracles. With the wisdom and inspiration from the Bible, one can satisfy his or her call. Medicine is a complex science of mending bodies, minds, and spirits. Challenging and yet gratifying, the healthcare field is a true opportunity to serve through healing.

There are many diverse people serving in medical capacities, and many of them share God-given skills and talents. “Clearly someone who communicates well, understands patients, and exercises sound clinical judgement is an excellent healthcare professional. But, they should also understand the basic mechanisms of disease, be able to test hypotheses, and show curiosity and a capacity for self-directed learning” (Oxford University). This is a sound explanation, but there needs to be more added to it. Compassion, ethics, empathy, honesty, and mercy are key attributes. It is humanity’s duty to care for each other. There are numerous references in the Bible about compassion, and Deuteronomy 30:3 illustrates this point perfectly, “... *then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes, and have compassion upon you, and He will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.*” This is a tremendous example for all to follow about how to treat one another, regardless of job or career.

There are many other aspects in the Bible that can be used for guidance and encouragement for those in the medical field. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah while he was kept in the court of the guard. Jeremiah 33: 6-7 says, “*Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first.*” This is a reminder of the Lord’s immense power. Modern medicine and healing techniques do not always work and are not always the answer. Medical professionals should do everything in their power to help humanity, but human beings live with limits. God has control over everything. He has the plans for everyone’s life, or the big picture.

Additionally, Mathew 11: 4-5 illustrates healing in a most profound way. “And Jesus answered them, “*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.*” As Jesus healed so many, one should try to impact and enrich others in the name of Christ. That is a great opportunity to complete the triangle of “God, self, and world.”

In the theological studies at the Summer Vocation Institute, I learned that God is at the top of the vocational triangle. The love from God comes down to the other two corners of the triangle, self and world. By practicing a medical specialty, the self part connects with the world part by making the world a better place. The world part can include a neighbor, family, friends, or any other citizen. Good works are helpful for the neighbor, but they do not achieve salvation. Salvation is obtained by “justification by grace through faith.” This



was a major point examined in Luther's 95 Theses. One discussion during SVI really resonated with me. The thought that "God is doing fine without your good works" really puts everything in perspective. The good works are for others, not for securing salvation. A believer should perform good works *because* of their faith. "... *And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons*" (Mathew 10:7-8). People find health careers as a way to use their gifts and to listen and obey the direction from God. A career in healing can be seen as a good work and as a way to fulfill the calling of vocation.

At SVI, I learned that a calling could be broken down into four parts: a divine caller (God); urgency (yet remains an invitation); ability to do the task (given by God); and a new relationship with the caller (meaning a new one between a believer and God). The idea of vocation is multiple, now, and ordinary. However, it is not always simple.

This paper is about healing and serving through medicine because that is what my goals and ambitions are. The field of medicine has impacted my life heavily, and I would like the chance to do the same for others. I plan to study pre-medicine, neuroscience, and ethics because I feel the desire to help others through the path of health care. "*In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28).

For as long as I can remember, I have always wanted to become a doctor. I will be a freshman in college this year, and I will actually be working toward a degree. I am excited to get one step closer to my dream. However, I know that God has amazing plans for me. "*No mere man has ever seen, heard, or even imagined what wonderful things God has ready for those who love the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Those plans may or may not involve a career in medicine. I will just have to be patient and listen. "*It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, He had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose He is working in everything and everyone*" (Ephesians 1:11).

God blessed everyone with strengths and weaknesses. It is with unique characteristics and personalities that He will use believers to fulfill a mission. Acts 13:36 says, "*David served the purpose of God in his own generation.*" No matter what vocations in life I end up pursuing, or what abilities and interests the Lord chooses to use in me, I wish to serve the purpose of God in my own generation. I want to make a positive change in the world in the name of Christ. To serve God's purpose, which is eternal and timeless, in a contemporary and timely way is the goal.

Vocation can be a challenging topic for young and old alike, whether they are healthcare workers or other professionals. It really does not matter. What truly matters is that a believer carries out the mission of God. Prayer is powerful. Through prayer, the Lord can give strength, love, courage, and perseverance. A prayer that is close to my heart is the "Prayer for Purpose." It is a prayer for **all** of the servants of the Lord. It reads: "Father, more than anything else I want to live for you and the purposes you created. I want my life to bring you pleasure as I live a lifestyle of worship. I want to be used to build the fellowship of your family, the church. I want to become like Jesus in the way I think and feel and act. I want to use the shape you have given me for a ministry to other believers. I want to fulfill my mission in the world by telling others about your love. Dear Lord, I want to serve you so that one day I may hear you say, '*Well done, good and faithful servant.*' Amen." As I embark on this new chapter in my life, I am not afraid. I trust in the Lord to lead me to my vocation, as I do my best to serve others for the glory of the Lord.



# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON VOCATION

by Peter Larsen, Minneapolis, Minn.

It was during the Summer Vocation Institute this year at Augsburg College that I first formally considered my vocation. After much deliberation and prayer, I believe that God has called me to become a pastor. In this paper, I will outline what I believe are the key steps in achieving my vocation. I will also write about how on this path, I can fulfill God's choice of vocation for me.

I understand my vocation to be that of serving as a pastor. I have always been interested in the church, and have played an active role in the development of my local congregation. I have served on committees and have been active in the youth trips. I have taken an active role in worship in my church during and after my confirmation.

I also feel that I have been blessed with the gifts of writing and music. I have always been involved with the musical aspect of the church, in that I have been a part of the choirs and have, on occasion, played the piano for the worship services.

In addition, I have always been very people-oriented, and it's always been easy for me to relate to every age group within the church and the community—whether it's with the children in the Vacation Bible School, the younger adult group in the church council and the committees, or the older adults in the congregation.

The initial question that I had was, "What is God calling me to be?" But now I believe that God has called me to be a pastor. With that, my real question now is, "Have I interpreted correctly?" The end result is that I need to trust in God, stay involved, pray for direction, and keep an open mind. As in the call of Moses, one needs to trust: "'Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country.' But Moses said to God, 'I am nobody. How can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' God answered, 'I will be with you, and when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain. That will be the proof that I have sent you'" (Exodus 3:10-12).

Like Moses, I trust God by staying involved with the church for the long haul while listening to what He has to say. All that I really need to know is that God has a path for me to take, and a purpose to fulfill along the way. With that, I am able to stay calm throughout the vocational discernment process.

But there are obstacles in the way. I recognize the need to obtain the requisite education through formal training, through prayer and meditation, and through continued hands-on experience in the church. I will also depend on the advice and assistance of my pastor. Age is really another factor in figuring out what God has in store for me, and what I feel that I am capable of doing. Age is seen as a factor in the call of Jeremiah. "The Lord said to me, 'I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet of the nations.' I answered 'Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am too young.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say that you are too young, but go to the people I send you to, and tell them everything that I command you to say. Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the Lord have spoken!'" (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

In my experience, I have found that to "make up" for an age difference, one really



needs to be prepared when presenting ideas to a committee, church, etc. One also really needs to be a very productive member of the group, and take any criticism with a grain of salt.

And of course, when one is doing work for the Lord God, he or she is bound to feel a bit anxious, like Joshua. But listening to God can still all one's apprehension, again, as in Joshua: "Joshua, no one will be able to defeat you as long as you live. I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will always be with you; I will never abandon you ... Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident! Do not be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:5, 9).

There were some things that I did not expect about vocation. One of the things that was really marveling was that everyone, no matter the age or experience, is really at different stages, and of course at all different jobs. But they are all for the sake of the Lord.

Another thing that really surprised me about vocation is that everyone possesses different positions in their vocation. Some people were really overly confident about what their vocation is, almost to the point of naiveté, where as others were scared almost to the point of paranoia over what their purpose in life was. Thankfully, I feel that I fit in the middle, calm, not over-anxious, but searching.

Something that really surprised me was my talents in relation to my vocation. In an activity at the Summer Vocation Institute at Augsburg College, we made a list of how God was calling each of us to be bold in our faith. We then took a piece or two of tile for each item on the list and made a mosaic from the tiles. Most of the items on my list had to do with the church, and my active role in it. When I looked at the list later on, the items I had listed were really those which were qualities that are useful as a pastor. I had no idea that my talents would help me on my way.

I also never really saw myself as having the profile of a pastor. I always thought that they are very serious about everything and always have all of the answers. But as my faith grows, as well as my understanding of vocation, I realize that they are really on a continued path of growth as well.

The other vocational issue that I didn't expect was the duties of a pastor. They can vary from creating a vision or mission statement for the church, writing out the monthly newsletter, and preparing Bible studies, to visiting shut-ins, preparing sermons, and counseling families or even other pastors.

I really believe that I have been called to be a pastor. This newfound vocation is really going to be a challenge, but also an extremely rewarding and exciting undertaking. I believe that in fulfilling my vocation, I will serve my purpose for God, and in the end, what more can you really ask for?



# THE WORLD COULD USE A FEW MORE LUTHERS

by Katie Mercadante, Baden, Pa.

*"There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one."<sup>1</sup>*

In his first letter to the people of Corinth, the Apostle Paul gives a real world definition of vocation. Each of us is given a variety of gifts. There are a variety of ways we use these gifts, but we still glorify the same Lord. There is a variety of work to be done, but it is all done because of the gifts we have been given by God. Ask just about anyone what they hoped to be remembered by and they will tell you that they hoped to be remembered for making a difference in the world. Some will say that they hope to be like Mother Theresa, and dedicate their lives to serving others. There is a laundry list of others whose footsteps it would be admirable to follow in. Among the names on this list is Martin Luther. Luther has made a sizeable impact in the lives of the millions of people who are members of protestant churches today. Luther was called to make a change, and stood up for what he believed in. So what if more people did just that? What if people stood up to adversity and made the changes they felt so passionate about? For that reason, I say, the world could use a few more Luthers.

The leading man in the protestant reformation was Martin Luther, born November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany. Luther's father urged him to pursue a degree in law, and so he attended the University of Erfurt where he obtained his baccalaureate degree in arts in 1502 and his master's degree in 1505.<sup>2</sup>

In 1505, the Bubonic Plague, also known as the "Black Death," swept over Erfurt, and several of Luther's closest friends died suddenly from the disease. Faced with his own mortality, Luther questioned his life's plan. After being caught in a thunderstorm, Luther prayed to Saint Anne to make it through. Again faced with his own mortality, it is said that he vowed to become a monk if he survived the storm.<sup>3</sup> He entered the Mendicant order of the Augustinian monks in Erfurt in 1505, and took his monk's vow in 1506. He was ordained as a priest in 1507, the same year he began his studies of theology at the University of Erfurt, and began to study the Bible in its original Hebrew and Greek text. In 1512, Luther received his doctorate in theology and began teaching at Wittenberg University. While studying Paul's Letter to the Romans, he came upon what was to be the foundation of his call for reform, the idea that people receive salvation through the grace of God, not by their good works. In 1514, Luther became priest at the City Church of Wittenberg.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians 12:4-5

<sup>2</sup> "Martin Luther's Life" [www.luther.de/en/geburt.html](http://www.luther.de/en/geburt.html)

<sup>3</sup> "The Life of Martin Luther" Frontline PBS

<sup>4</sup> "Martin Luther's Life" [www.luther.de/en/moench.html](http://www.luther.de/en/moench.html)



Luther became distraught that people were no longer coming to confession, but buying indulgence instead as a way to “save their souls.” So, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther took matters into his own hands, nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church. Luther stuck his neck out, so to speak, to make a difference in the world. The impact of his decision to stand up would still be felt nearly 500 years later. Risking being burnt at the stake, Luther continued writing. In *Freedom of the Christian*, Luther called for a personal relationship with God, instead of the reliance on works, elaborate rituals and dogma that he found tyrannical. He rejected the sacramental system as having no scriptural basis in *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* called for the end of pilgrimages, privately endowed Masses, the veneration of saints, and festival days.<sup>5</sup> In these three documents, Luther emotionally separated himself from the papacy. Because of these works, a Papal Bull was issued on June 15, 1520, threatening excommunication if Luther did not recant his teachings. Luther responded in protest and burnt the Papal Bull, as well as several books of the church. On January 3, 1521, Luther was excommunicated.

After leaving the Imperial Diet of Worms, Luther was kidnapped by his friend, Elector Friedrich the Wise, and taken to Warburg to “ride out the storm.” While in Wartburg, Luther busied himself by translating the New Testament from Greek into German in only 11 weeks. The work was edited and printed in 1522. Following a short time later, Luther returned to Wittenberg where the radical functions of the Reformation had gained control.<sup>6</sup>

The Reformation gained legal backing in 1526 at the First Imperial Diet of Spire. Protestants were granted the legal right to go ahead with their reforms, but it was left up to the local sovereigns as to the extent.

At the Imperial Diet of Augsburg, Luther’s representative, Phillip Melancthon, read the Augsburg Confession, which contained the beliefs of the reformers in detail.<sup>7</sup>

On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died and on February 22 was laid to rest in the Castle Church in Wittenberg.<sup>8</sup> Luther’s impact would still be felt after the turn of the 21st century, as the Lutheran church, professing the ideas of Luther, had grown into one of the largest protestant denominations in the world.

Many would ask what a 16th century monk has to do with teenagers today, and their calling in life. The answer is very simple. Luther stuck his neck out, period. He believed in something and he stood up for it. What would happen if there were more people like Luther today? What if people didn’t passively stand by?

Less than a month after I returned home from the Summer Vocation Institute in Minneapolis, I had the opportunity to spend a week as a counselor at a summer camp for middle-school-aged leaders, in Western Pennsylvania. However, it wasn’t my working with the amazing and awe-inspiring students that made the largest impact. During the intense

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<sup>5</sup> Severy, Merle, “The World of Luther,” *National Geographic* 164, No. 4 (1983) 418+

<sup>6</sup> “Martin Luther’s Life” [www.luther.de/en/worms.html](http://www.luther.de/en/worms.html)

<sup>7</sup> [www.luther.de/en/hochzeit.html](http://www.luther.de/en/hochzeit.html)

<sup>8</sup> [www.luther.de/en/tod.html](http://www.luther.de/en/tod.html)



staff training, we were asked to pair up with our staff partner and answer a series of questions that had been supplied to us. When my partner, RJ, and I sat down to do it, one question had us stumped. "If you could follow in the footsteps of one person, who would it be and why?" RJ said he would like to be like his father who did so much for so many people. After a little thought, I said that I would like to follow in the footsteps of someone who made a sizeable impact in the lives of many, and would be remembered hundreds of years after his or her death. I came to the conclusion that I would love to follow in the footsteps of Martin Luther, who has made an impact on the lives of people still today. When we presented our partners to the group, no one was too surprised at whom I had chosen, which makes me wonder if people see something in me that I don't see in myself.

Over a year ago, sometime before Rehoboth Lutheran Church made its first trip to Minnesota and SVI, my pastor, Scott, approached me about the topic of seminary. I laughed, hard. There was no way I would be going to seminary. Since I have been in third grade, I have wanted to be a meteorologist. More specifically, I want to be the nut that heads to places unknown until hurricane season, and reports "live from the eye of the storm." I can hear it now, the people at the Weather Channel kicking it over to Katie, who is reporting live from [*insert the name of a coastal city here*] where a category five hurricane named [*some obscure name here*] is starting to make landfall. Everyone else has been gone for days, but I had stayed to send that live report to all the people at home. Just as I had been inspired by the reporter who had done it before, I hoped to be the role-model for the third-grader who was glued to the TV watching the Weather Channel. The geeky third-grader who knew that the tropical update came on at 10 to the hour, every hour. The very same third-grader who could tell you that if the internal pressure of the weather system dropped below 950 millibars it was bad.

The last time I had checked, they didn't teach meteorology or the study of clouds in seminary. So, seminary was out of the question. I thought Pastor Scott was nuts. Me. In seminary. That would be like mixing oil and water. It wouldn't be pretty! So, as I sit here finishing this paper, I am just one week from entering college. Exactly a week from today, I will begin to reach for my dream. In two weeks I will be sitting in a classroom listening to lectures in my Intro to Meteorology class. I will take the required calculus, and I will work my way, slowly but surely to a degree in meteorology. Someday, just maybe, I will be reporting live from the eye of the storm. However, I can't help but wonder, should I still consider seminary? What if Pastor Scott sees something in me that I don't see in myself? What if my passion isn't really my passion? I found myself particularly thinking about this at the end of the school year.

The state of Pennsylvania requires each high school senior to complete a senior graduation project in order to be certified as having met all the requirements for graduation. While some seniors chose to complete science research projects, others chose to restore an old car and things that related to their hobby. When it came time to pick a topic for my project, I chose to coordinate the youth program for grades 7 through 12 at church. While it was a lot of work, and actually caused more headaches than I thought it would, I looked forward to being there. I enjoyed finding new and different ways to present common Bible stories and lessons to the teenagers who chose to come. While there were confrontations and arguments, and plenty of moments that I was ready to quit and say "I



don't care anymore!" to go with them, I was glad I stuck it out in the long run and dealt with the adversity. It especially makes it well worth it when you have an eighth-grader tell you that they want you to come back next year. I was sad to see May come and go, as it was the last meeting that I would be in charge of, and am still a little upset that being in college won't facilitate working as hands-on with the program as I would like.

So, maybe the lack of appreciation is a reason that people don't enter into ordained ministry, or even choose to work in the church. They pour their heart and soul into something, and are met with little more than hatred and animosity. I know from experience that it makes you feel pretty worthless to have someone get in your face and tell you that you are wrong and have always been wrong, and have no clue what you are doing.

Vocation and calling is a tough subject to sell to many teenagers, in my opinion. With things like calculus and prom to worry about, teenagers have other things on their mind than whether God is calling them. In schools today, being the overly "churchy" kid isn't cool. Being able to quote passages from the Bible isn't as cool as knowing the lyrics to the latest rap song or the latest sports statistics and news. With teams scheduling practice and games on Sunday mornings, it is sometimes even impossible to even attend a worship service. A lot of the time, church isn't a priority. So, in turn, when asked what his or her vocation is, a typical teenager will answer that he or she is a student or may mention whatever he or she happens to do at their part-time job. When you look up vocation in the dictionary, it is defined as, "A regular occupation, especially one for which a person is particularly suited or qualified."<sup>9</sup> It isn't until you scroll down to the second and third definition that you even come remotely close to what I would say is a more accurate definition. With so little emphasis on your calling and so much emphasis on these get rich quick professions, is it any wonder that there are so few people walking through the doors of seminaries these days? It is no wonder that people end up in a job that makes them miserable and switch professions in their mid-life. Many times people worry more about how much money they will make more than they worry how much of a difference they will make in the world.

With so much emphasis on "he said" or "she said," it is no wonder that people won't open their mouths about things that they believe in. It happens in congregations around the ELCA. There is no way to stop it, but what if people did? What if people weren't afraid to stand up for what they believed in? What if instead of going along with what is popular, people stuck their neck out? What if everyone made a commitment to make a difference, somehow? Would they meet adversity? Sure they would. Would it be hard? Of course. Would the world be a better place? You bet it would. If everyone stood up for what they believed was right, I truly think that the world would be a better place. What the world needs is a few more people who are willing to do just that. A little change never hurt anyone, and no one can ever discredit a person for trying his or her hardest. A lasting impact isn't so bad. The world could use a few more Luthers.

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<sup>9</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition  
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# ME, MYSELF, AND ... GOD

by Elizabeth Jorgenson, Maple Grove, Minn.

When I originally began this paper in June, I was planning to write about the differences and similarities between urban and suburban ministries. I was completely fascinated by both contexts, and I wanted to learn more. I still do, but as the summer progressed, I felt like God was calling me to write about something else. Something that was closer to me, to my heart, and to my experiences. I searched for many hours trying to discover what God was calling me to write about. Finally, I picked up the copy of the *Till and Keep* journal that was given to us at the Summer Vocation Institute. I opened to the second story. It was a personal reflection by Professor Beverly J. Stratton called "Glimpses of Grace." Professor Stratton wrote about her life and what God was calling her to do. She wrote about the changes in life, the sufferings that make us stronger, the gifts that God gives us, and how we can discover God's grace by simply looking at our lives in a different perspective. I was fascinated by her article. A lot of the things that she wrote about made perfect sense. If I learned so much from just one person's story, imagine what I could learn if I heard hundreds of stories. So after I finished reading the reflection, I decided to write one of my own, modeled after Professor Stratton's. I feel like God is calling me to tell others my reflections on life. This is my story.

What should I do with my life? Where should I go to college? What is my vocation? What should I major in? Will I find my soul mate? Am I going to succeed or fail? In my life, especially now as I prepare for my senior year in high school, I have many questions that I cannot find the answers to. It's not like a math test where I can study and practice hard to get the correct answer. Or like a trivia game where the answers come from the back of the card. This is my life, my future. I want to do what is right for me, what will prepare me the best for the future. But as I look back on these questions, I feel like I should be asking some completely different ones. Every question in that list has to do with me and only me. I am selfishly thinking of myself, making sure that I take care of number one. But now, I have realized that I don't need to take as much care of number one. Why not? Because God is there to do it for me. I am His child; therefore, He has a plan for me, for my future. I should be asking myself these questions instead: Where does God fit into my plan? What does God want me to do? How is He calling me? What gifts has He given me? Who are the people that He has sent into my life to guide me? I thought about these questions for a very long time before I was able to see glimpses of God's plan. These words are my reflections on what God is calling me to be.

At first glance, it seems I should try to answer the question, "Where does God fit into my plan?" Most people believe that they have complete control over their lives. They don't believe in fate or destiny. They think that they can handle any decision that comes their way. But they only believe this until something happens unexpectedly, like when a spouse dies, a child becomes ill, a job is lost, or a friend is sent away. Any number of things could happen to a person who thinks he or she has total control of his or her life. After the



unexpected happens, the person does not know what to do, where to turn, who to count on. Since he or she only depended on him or herself, he or she has nowhere to go and is lost, alone, and afraid in the darkness. But this person does have somewhere to turn. He or she has someone to run to when the going gets tough. This person has God. What this person doesn't realize is that he never had complete control over his or her life. God was always there, carefully controlling everything that he or she wanted to. Yes, it's true that God doesn't decide if I buy high heels or tennis shoes, or if my friend dyes her hair blond or purple. Professor Mark Tranvik said something one day during our discussion that really stuck in my mind. He said, "God doesn't care about the small things, but He has control of the important things." God could not care less about our everyday lives, but He has a plan for the important things. God gives us our freedom when He gives us His grace. Some people may choose to ignore Him, but He is always there, leading us and guiding us in our lives. So really my question should be: "Where do I fit into God's plan?"

Second, God gives each and every person spiritual gifts that are part of that person's calling. One of my gifts is music. I love to sing and praise the Lord through music. Recently, I went to a music camp called "Music Ministry Alive!" It's an annual camp that brings together music ministers from all over the world to sing, play, worship, and praise. This experience changed my life. I learned so much from these music ministers because God was calling them to be themselves. They were ministers whose vocation is to sing and play and make music to praise the Lord and to bring joy to others. I distinctly remember that most of the Summer Vocation Institute evening worship services included music, and that made me so happy. I am very thankful that God has given me the gift of music to share with others. God created music to be enjoyable, passionate, moving, and praising of Him. As Psalm 108:1 says, "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody." God is calling me to be a minister of music at this time in my life, and I plan to fulfill that calling to the best of my ability.

Another gift that God has given me to use in my vocation is youth. I am young, as I am well aware. People are always telling me that I don't really know what life is like, and I will find out when I am older. But I do know what life is like. I know what the life of a teenager is like in today's society. I know what it's like to be a young Christian. I know what it's like to be a musician, a sister, a daughter, a friend. I know how to be young. God has called me to be a young Christian, to share the Good News with those who are older than me, to be a good role model for those younger than me, to be innocent and optimistic in many ways. And I am using this gift to help fulfill my calling. I listen to and respect my elders and care for those younger than me. 1 Timothy 4:12 says, "Let no one despise your youth, but set believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." God is calling me to be youthful and to be a true believer.

Next, God sends suffering into our lives to show us how much He really loves us. At times in my life, I have felt that God has abandoned me. I felt like I've been alone in the world because so many things have gone wrong. I didn't get what I wanted, people betrayed me, or someone extremely important to me went away or died. I thought that God was mad at me and was punishing me for some reason. I didn't know what I had done to deserve this punishment, and I felt angry, sad, terrified, and guilty. Why was God punishing me? I don't



know the answer, and I never will. God was simply testing me, trying to bring me back to my calling and to His plan. I strayed too far away from God, and I wasn't living the life He was calling me to live. I needed some guidance, some protection, some love. God also wanted me to trust Him. He sends pain into our lives to make sure that we still trust in Him and know that He will never abandon us. "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock" (Isaiah 26:4). Sometimes, God sends suffering into our lives because He is calling us to grieve and to learn a lesson. When I am grieving, I know that I am much more attuned to other people's sufferings, which brings us closer together. I learn so much from these people, and it happens because of suffering. God calls us to grieve, to suffer, to learn, and to trust because He loves us so much. He gave up His own son for us. Maybe we should give a little bit back to Him.

Finally, God is always sending us signs and signals, leading us down the path to our vocation. We just have to follow them. Over the last year, I have had a very hard time. Lots of things have happened to me that I wish that I could change or take back. I know that I haven't been the strongest Christian over the past year because of these temptations and obstacles. But I never completely left God. I never said, "OK God, this is over. I'm sick and tired of everything that's going on, and I'm leaving." I know that I could never leave God. And He will never leave me. I know that God always loves me, always protects me, and always guides me along my way because He has given me His grace. He has called me to be one of His children, to bring others into His love, to share my gifts with others. God has given me grace by sending all of my family and friends and mentors into my life. He has called me to be a troubled teenager and to struggle with my faith. And believe me, faith is not easy. Especially in today's world. So many temptations arise from all corners of the earth, and God has a lot of competition. But He continues to give us His grace because He loves us so much and has a plan for us all. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God calls us, through His Son. We just have to follow, and we'll receive the best prize of all time.

In conclusion, God is calling me in many ways. He is calling me to be a minister of music, to be an example of a young Christian, to be a follower, to love and comfort others. I am called to be a sister, a daughter, a student, a friend, and to be a child of God. Every day, God gives us His grace, so that we may be called to Him and receive the eternal reward. He loves us so much. Each and every person is perfect in God's eyes, and we all have a purpose. That's what vocation is to me. God's purpose for me. God has several purposes for me, and they will change as I grow, but I know that I will always be called. I don't know what the future is going to bring. I don't know what I'm called to do next. I don't know where to go. But I trust in God. I have hope for the future because of His love for me. He's calling me, all I have to do is watch and listen. "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).



# HOW BEING USED CAN BE A GOOD THING

by TJ Rydeen, Stillwater, Minn.

In modern society, happiness is rated by how successful someone is and how much money someone has. When a person does become successful he or she may wonder, "When will I be happy?" A mind is a beautiful thing and so is a body but some people rely on just the mind or just the body and forget about the other parts that make us human. They forget about our souls and the Holy Spirit in us guiding us to a vocation. What is my vocation? What is my purpose in life? In order to answer these questions vocation must first be understood. We must also understand what it is God calls us to do, how he calls us, and what happens if we get lost along the way.

What is a vocation or a calling? Isn't that what happens to pastors? They get called to our church. So what does this have to do with me? God has callings for everyone. He plans vocations for all. God calls people to do all jobs. He calls people to be milk deliverers, postal workers, police officers, judges, wait staff, chefs, and so on and so forth. Some people think, "I have a job so I don't have to worry about calling." God also calls people to be mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandparents, great grandchildren, and more. A calling is what God calls people to do in life. A person may be called to be a husband, a son, a father, a mechanic, and a child of God all at once.

Sometimes God calls us to do things that we don't understand. He knows why He has us do it though. It could be as simple as stopping to smell a flower or as complicated as what he had the prophet Hosea do. God called Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children with her. Then God called him to name his first son Jezreel because the Israelites massacred the people at Jezreel. When he had a daughter, God had him name her No-Mercy because he had run out of mercy for Israel. God made Hosea name his second son Nobody because the Israelites had become "nobodies" to God. These seem like a strange calling but God has plans for everyone and calls us all to do things that we would never have thought of doing.

Callings change and grow with time while some last longer than others. When my mom was born, God called her to be a daughter of Hart and Shirley Holmberg. She was baptized and called to be a child of God. By having two sisters and a brother, God was calling her to be a sister of Katrina, Karen, and Hart Holmberg. When she turned 5, she was called to be a student at school. When she was 17, she graduated from high school. Later on she started dating my dad and was called to be a girlfriend. She got married and was called to be a wife. She had a daughter and was called to be mother. She and my dad bought a house and were called to be homeowners. I was born and she was called to be a mother of two children. She was called to do daycare. Ten years later she was called to stop doing daycare and be a cashier at a little grocery store near home and a few years after that she was called to be a dietary aide at a little café in a senior home. Now she is called to be café manager of the same café, a mother, a wife, a friend, a neighbor, a daughter, a sister, a child of God, and more. One person can have many callings at the same time, all of which are ever changing and growing.

God made the earth in seven days and on one of those days He made humankind. God gave us legs to walk, arms to reach, hands to grab, and minds to think. He gave us a soul. The most important thing He gives us is the Holy Spirit, promising that He would never leave us. The Holy Spirit is our conscience and it guides us, telling us what is right



and what is wrong. In some movies and shows, the makers try to explain conscience by having a little demon on one shoulder and an angel on the other shoulder. In a way that is what it is like. The only difference is that in the show the angel and demon go away and in life they do not.

The world we live in has trouble with trust. Something goes wrong so we decide that no one knows what is best for ourselves other than ourselves. We need to learn to trust God like the prophet Jeremiah learned to. Jeremiah was scared a first and tried to excuse himself from the vocation God was giving him. When God called Jeremiah he was only a boy and that is what he told God. God replied in Jeremiah 1:8, "Don't be afraid of a soul." Jeremiah trusted God and did His will. Even when God had him doing things that he, at first, didn't understand. God had Jeremiah buy a pair of shorts and wear them for a while without washing them and then put them in a rock. Jeremiah at the time didn't understand what it was that God was calling him to do but he trusted God and did it. When he took the shorts out of the rock a while later God explained that like the shorts he was going to ruin the pride of Judah and Jerusalem. When God closes a door He always opens a window. We need to trust God and follow where He leads us.

Life is a road. Sometimes it is paved, other times it's gravel. It can be wet and it can be dry but most importantly it is ever changing. Every day our road forks off into more roads. God gave us free will to choose our own path and to pick the left or the right or even sometimes the middle path. God never leaves us, no matter what path we take. God has a million of little signs pointing us in the right direction. Even if we turn the wrong direction God does not abandon us. God just gives us more signs calling us to go a certain direction and do a certain things. Jesus explains in Matthew 18:12-14 what happens if we do stray.

(Jesus said to the disciples) 'Look at it this way. If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine and go after the one? And if he finds it, doesn't he make far more over it than the ninety-nine who stay put? Your Father in heaven feels the same way. He doesn't lose even one of these simple believers.'

God doesn't give up on us but he continues on with guiding us and getting us to do his calling. The more important the calling, the more signs there are and stronger the signs are. Jonah is an example of how God never gives up. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh but instead he gets on a boat going to Tarshish. God sent a storm, and Jonah gets thrown overboard, eaten by a whale. Jonah then prays to God. He gets spit up and he ends up going to Nineveh. Once someone finds God, God does not let them go.

God speaks to us regularly, both directly and through other people, but we are not always listening. We need to do like Samuel did when God calls us answer, "Speak. I'm your servant, ready to listen" (1 Samuel 3:10). God has lots of things to say and to give to us. God gives us His love, forgiveness, and word and we are to share it with the rest of the world just like the rest of the world is meant to share his love, forgiveness, and word with us.

God has callings for everyone and they are ever changing. God guides us to these callings and to new ones when the time is right. We must trust that God has put the best choice in front of us. God knows best and if we listen and trust in Him, then He who knows all will use us for His will and make the world we live in a better place for us and others. He will use us in ways that will bring others closer to God and use others in ways that will bring us closer to Him.



# COMING TOGETHER AS ONE

by Marissa Jackson, Bloomington, Minn.

I've been to many churches in my life, and I thought they were all the same. A place to go on Sundays to worship Christ and have coffee with the other church goers. Not till this summer at the Summer Vocation Institute at Augsburg College did I get to experience what two churches other than my own are like. I got to learn about the different vocations that they have and how they come together to worship Christ.

The first church that we visited was Bethany Lutheran Church in the Seward Neighborhood of Minneapolis. "Bethany [Lutheran Church] is a Christian congregation called to unite people from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to grow in the love of Jesus Christ," as stated in one of their pamphlets. Another thing that is very special about Bethany Lutheran is the way they feel about sexuality. They have a great deal of hospitality to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. They host the Naming Project, which is a faith-based youth group serving youth of all sexual orientations and gender identities. It's a place where youth can comfortably discuss faith and their lives regardless of sexual orientation or gender identify. It's very neat to see them so welcoming of such a diverse background, even when people around their community are not. They are a great church that God has called to proclaim the good news and to welcome all people in their congregation without regard to sexual orientation, cultural, or ethnic background, physical or mental abilities, family status, gender, or age.

The second church we visited was Redeemer Lutheran Church. Redeemer is a place with lots of spirit and joy. The first night at Augsburg we got to experience a little bit of what Redeemer is about. They have a service on Sunday nights called JUMP, which stands for Joint Urban Ministries in Praise.

JUMP was a great service with lots of dancing, singing, and praising of Christ in a fun-filled way. I felt like I was a part of JUMP because of all the opportunities I had to worship Christ in so many different ways throughout the service. Later in the week we had an opportunity to go back to Redeemer and to learn about what Redeemer has to offer. Redeemer works a lot with the youth of the community in order to keep them off the streets and to keep them safe. They have programs after school where kids can go and hang out, learn about Christ, and receive a free meal. Another thing that caught my eye was that they own a building that they will be turning into an ice cream shop where the kids will be working to get experience. They are also going to have wood floors and mirrors installed for a dance studio, and on the lower level a recording studio for all those who want to record the musical gifts God has given them. Redeemer reaches out to the community and welcomes everyone—young, old, black, white. One phrase that jumped out at me was, "There are many rooms in my Father's house!"

Both churches are called by God to serve Him and to be of good service to others in the community in totally different ways, but at the end of the week, it's all for Jesus Christ. They come together as one to serve and to worship Christ. "To love another person is to see the face of God." Both churches love humankind every day while worshipping Christ and welcoming everyone around their community. The week at Augsburg is something I'll never forget!



# SERVING THROUGH KINDNESS

by Emily Wiles, Prentice, Wisc.

Everyone is taught to be kind to others, but why is that so important for people in the church? Because of people's kindness toward one another, a connection is developed between them that can open a doorway to tell them about church and God. It's all about the service of love. The beginning of this kind of service was when God created humankind, eventually sending us His son, Jesus Christ. Now, while we are waiting for Christ to come again, we are the ones who have to share His love with others so that they may see God as wonderful and remarkable. We are the ones that people see everyday and they do look to see what is different about us and what we have, so why not be bold and show our connection to God as it is the ultimate way to serve Him.

Kindness, along with all things, begins with God. Throughout our lives, He forms us so that we may be able to help others in our daily activities. God's love is demonstrated throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to Jesus' life and beyond. The reason why God sent his son was to save us from sin and also to serve. When Jesus was talking with James and John, he said something that shows what I want to share. He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>1</sup> That is what we should be doing; we should be here on Earth to serve, not to be served, just like Christ.

Whether you know it or not, he trains us every time we open our Bible, go to church, go to Bible study, attend confirmation, or do something with fellow members of God's family. Through the confirmation classes and activities, we have learned what Luther believed about the Ten Commandments. He thought that not only do the Ten Commandments teach what not to do but, also, what to do. So, when they say, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor and you shall not covet ..."<sup>2</sup>, it also says that you should "help and support [neighbors] in all of life's needs, to lead pure and decent lives in word and deed ... and to come to [a neighbors'] defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light."<sup>3</sup> That's the church-based way of saying be kind and be there for your neighbor.

Sometimes it's not even in religious situations, like church, that we learn from God. It's the everyday circumstances in which we really learn about God and how to serve others with kindness. Everyday, people should open their Bible and at least read a few verses and reflect on them. A person who does this can find verses like Ephesians 4:32, which says "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you." Another verse that can help with kindness is in Titus, "to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but to be gentle, showing all meekness unto men."<sup>4</sup>

Another way that everyday connection to God can help a person to help others is prayer. Not necessarily praying for someone else but praying for the guidance so that one can help others. Prayer lets people have a one-on-one relationship with God that lets them feel close to him so they can hear and actually listen to what God wants from them: to have faith like a child and to proclaim God's love to others.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:45 NIV

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 20:16-17a NIV

<sup>3</sup> Stoffregen, Brian P. "John 1:6-8, 19-28 3rd Sunday in Advent - Year B." Cross Marks. 18 Jul. 2005 <<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/john1x6.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Titus 3:2 King James Version



All that needs to be done to serve others is to be kind. Being kind isn't hard, it doesn't take a miracle. It's been taught to us since we were little, like asking if someone needs help, saying please or thank you, or just being there for others. Then the question is, are we, as Christians, shining with kindness? Are we offering our light from God to others? Someone I know once said, "If I never do another thing with my life, I can be safe in knowing that I shared the word of God with hundreds of children while teaching Sunday School and Vacation Bible School ... that I'm not afraid to go to chapel. I think that my little 'Bless You' when someone sneezes on the street, and the fact that I take the time to smile at children who I don't know says a lot about the little light that I am shining with."<sup>5</sup> She's right; it doesn't have to be the huge, mammoth things that you can do, it can be the smiles and little gestures that people remember you being a kind person. A person can show them through little things and be safe in knowing that someone is going to know how compassionate he or she really is.

Do people really notice our light? When I was in eighth grade, I was up for an honor award. I asked one of my teachers if he would write a recommendation letter for me, and he said yes. I never thought I would see that letter, but my principal gave it to me. I was a little surprised, and while reading it, I realized something. Just maybe, I had impacted somebody's life in some small way. He said I have "demonstrated a kindness and caring attitude that is not found in junior high girls ... I've found her honest, down-to-earth attitude refreshing ... and I respect her character."<sup>6</sup> My teacher said this about me when I saw myself as an average girl. It took a while to think differently about myself but I did because I realized my heart was different because it is full of God's love for others. My teacher observed that I didn't call others nasty names but instead was kind to them, even if nobody else was, and that made an impression. It made me different and unusual, and I still, to this day, want to be unusual.

People will see the connection of a person being kind to a person being a part of God's family. It's already been mentioned that it's the little stuff a person does that people will notice and see the good in that person. An author who wanted to describe to his daughters about faith said, "To find God, you don't have to cast your glance upwards, you merely have to look around you."<sup>7</sup> In that simple sentence, the author says that people notice that you have something different; you have a great inner strength (God) that gives you your own sense of service and they will connect this to being a part of God's Kingdom.

For me, I want to be remembered for being that sweet, authentic girl who was kind, compassionate, and went out of her way to help others. I hope I become someone important in history, not in the way that everyone will know me but for the reason that I want to share God's love with everyone I meet through what I do everyday. I want to change the world, even if that world is for one person. This change doesn't have to be later in life. It doesn't have to happen when I am old and wise with diplomas to show but even when I am young and the only diploma I have is from my kindergarten class. I know now that I'm already doing it.

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<sup>5</sup> Starich, Rikki. "here's some answers for you...." E-mail to Emily Wiles. 5 Jul 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Petrashek, Ken. "Letter of Recommendation." 24 April 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Van Munching, Philip. *Boys Will Put You on a Pedestal (So They Can Look up Your Skirt)*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005.



A friend, who went to confirmation class with me, wrote in my yearbook something that has made me humble in knowing I've already changed someone's life. She said, "I never used to go to church much and you made me realize it is not such a bad place. I love going now."<sup>8</sup> I think it's because she saw that "something" different in me that she put the connection between who I am and going to church. I believe it took her a while but she did it and others can too.

Wherever we are and wherever we go, we are and will be shining lights for God. I think the greatest way we can shine toward others is to serve them with love. Eventually people will connect what we do to who we really are, children of God. This ultimate service is in us now and forever so remember this: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sarkkinen, Sasha. "Yearbook Entry." May 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 5:16 NIV



# FORGIVING GOD?

by Ali Berndt, Shoreview, Minn.

This summer, while participating in the Summer Vocation Institute at Augsburg College, the word “vocation” rang in each and every discussion. We learned that vocation is not necessarily a career or job, but a calling from God. Part of our calling, as Christians, is to live out a life as Jesus intends us to. Forgiveness is easily one of the most important, yet difficult, callings to live out a Christ-like life. But what happens when the stakes are higher? What happens when the forgiveness is beyond our community of people? When bad things happen to good people, is it in our hands to forgive God?

As a child, you admire superheroes ... Superwoman, Spiderman, Batman, (the list is unending). Yet if you ask nearly any child who their true superhero is, they will not be shy to scream out “MY DADDY!”

We all have memories of our fathers, or father-figures. However, my memories were cut short. When I was 11, my superhero died. How can you explain to an 11-year-old that her father’s death was providence of God? How can you tell her that there is no blame, no source of her anger? It is very difficult to complete the grieving process without anything holding responsibility for the hurt. Because of this, I want to find out why and how a person forgives God for such horrible events. Does God hold blame?

As Christians we want to forgive. Our scripture ensures us that God always forgives us, and we model our lives to his likeness. However, even our professor during the Summer Vocation Institute flinched when the topic arose of forgiving someone beyond forgiveness: The Creator, the Savior ... the forgiving God.

After interviewing many people of various ages and backgrounds on the subject matter, I found that forgiveness is defined differently for each person. For some, it’s something that must be deserved, and for others it’s something we, as Christians, must do. As for forgiving God, I collectively found that we may look at this controversial topic in one of two ways. One train of thought is that God does no evil and the events of suffering belong to the decisions of the devil. Therefore, God holds no blame. Hence, no forgiveness is needed. Many people agree with this statement, yet my mind was uneasy with it. It brings up the question of why God would let the devil control his people’s lives, and suffer in such a way. It takes me back to exactly where I started ... if God lets the devil control events in our lives, isn’t it God’s fault?

The other idea I established was that as what Job eventually assumed, all things, good and bad, are God’s work. God created humans. Humans are often required to suffer. It may be a part of a larger plan. Perhaps suffering will help us in the long run, or there is a greater good involved. But even yet, that still makes me wonder, is suffering still needed to complete God’s plan?

After all my research in the Bible and seeing other people’s ideas through interviews, I’m wedged in between ideas of God’s control, and the devil’s faults. But what I do know is that without God, I wouldn’t have gotten out of my suffering, nor realized his love and mercy.

Maybe suffering helps us understand God more clearly. Perhaps it confuses us more about him. Whether we blame God or not is no longer the question ... whether we can forgive him or not is not reasonable either. What this helped me understand is that we don’t know all the answers, and we will probably never know them. We just have to learn to accept things that come our way, to ask “why” for everything, and to use God’s calling as our guide through it all.



# EVANGELISM

*by Juliana Brandt, Rosemount, Minn.*

Continuing the work of Christ has been left to God's children, the Christians. Since the ascension of Jesus, the growth of the Kingdom of God has been appointed to the evangelist. As the church has grown, the position of the evangelist has become a specific office in the church. One may question if this is what was meant to happen. Perhaps evangelism was never meant to be a duty for specific people, but rather a vocation for all Christians.

In society, evangelism is most often associated with Christians such as Billy Graham and preachers lining street corners. Ephesians 4:11 states, "The gifts he gave were some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." This quote implies evangelism is a specific vocational call for certain people. However, this does not imply that the rest of the Christians are excused from evangelizing. The people chosen for the duty of evangelism are to act as guardians, or people who will mentor other followers of Christ. During the 20th and 21st centuries, evangelism has been closely associated with revivals. Revivals have played an important role as a special event in the life of the evangelist. But this is not where the every day evangelist lives. The every day evangelist lives in society and is commonly known as a Christian.

"Christian" is a term applied to the followers of Jesus. They are little Christs in thought and action. A Christian has a responsibility to follow the footsteps of Jesus. His footsteps lead toward the continuation of his ministry, which is accomplished through individual Christians taking initiative in spreading the Word of the gospel. Christ's ministry on Earth sought to reconcile the human race with God. After his death and resurrection, his ministry was left to his disciples. 2 Corinthians 5: 20a states, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us ..." This means it is through his followers spreading the Word of the Lord, that his ministry will be fulfilled.

The beginning of Jesus' work with the disciples began when he called to them in Mark 1:17, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." While this is a specific call given to Simon and Andrew, these words can also be interpreted as a call to all disciples. Jesus teaches Christians to "fish for people," to persist in adding to the new community centered on the gospel of Christ. So what does it mean for Christians to "fish for people" and how do Christians know this is a call for them?

The answer is found in Romans 10:14-15, which reads, "How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ..." Paul writes that unless someone spreads the gospel to those who have not heard, they will never hear. If only those designated to be evangelists speak of the Word, only a few will learn of Christ. Jesus uses the first disciples as examples for his coming followers. The call given to Simon and Andrew is intended to be a mission for all of Jesus' followers. All Christians are disciples and are commanded to "fish for people." This indicates that Christians have been preordained to carry out Jesus' message. They should not ignore their call to evangelize and spread the Word of God.

Jesus' last commandment resembles his first call. In Matthew 28:19-20 he gives his disciples the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." This is a challenge and a mission from God



that gives little room for misunderstanding. This task gives direction and purpose to life for people. All of Jesus' followers have the purpose of expanding the Kingdom of God. Jesus also says in the Great Commission "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). Christ has been given the authority to commission his disciples. The Great Commission is a command coming not only from Jesus, but also from God. God is sending His children out into the world to make disciples of all nations.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). How are Christians sent out? This answer is found by looking at the way Christ was sent by God. Jesus' ministry was composed of miracles, healings, preaching, teaching, and was overwhelmingly characterized by his love for the world. God sent Jesus to love and care for His children on this earth. It was through this love that people were attracted to the message of Christ. Jesus' followers are also sent out into the world with the love of God. Through this love people will begin to be attracted to the message of Christ and will eventually believe.

"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 John 3:18). Evangelizing does not only mean speaking about Christ's death and resurrection to others who have not heard, but also following God's instructions to show love through actions. If God's work is to be seen, love must be acted and displayed so those who do not believe have the opportunity to discover Christ's love. God's message is spread to lives by individuals seeing and experiencing God's work and love. The Great Commission's purpose may not have been to tell us to directly speak and baptize, but it does encourage us to share God's love and grace with others and teach them the ways of the Lord. It is accomplished through this way of teaching other people about Jesus. Christ commands first and foremost to love. His love is shared through Christians and it is called evangelism.

There are different types of evangelism. Some methods are more effective than others. One form preaches the gospel at every opportunity possible, pressing the topic on those around them. This type of evangelism pushes people away and snuffs out their interest to know and understand the gospel. A second form of evangelism shows love through acts of kindness, but doesn't require evangelizers to talk to people about their belief in the Good News. If no one talks to each other, no one will ever be able to learn. A third form of evangelism promotes love through action, but it also incorporates the subject of Jesus. It encourages evangelizers to determine when the timing is right so people may learn and feel comfortable hearing the message. The third form demonstrates the kind of evangelism God has asked Christians to perform; sharing his love through action and teaching his word.

Having the vocation of evangelism is not meant to be an obstacle in the path of a Christian life, but an outlet for sharing the joy the gospel brings. Evangelism may be a topic many Christians do not want to recognize because of the duty it corresponds with. It requires stepping outside of customary boundaries to share the gospel message. Evangelism is English for the Greek word *eu-aggelos*, which means "bringing good news." While many Christians may want to avoid becoming evangelists, it is their vocation to "bring the good news" of Jesus' love.



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# SETTING THE COURSE

by Emily Papke-Larson, Bemidji, Minn.

The sinking of the Titanic is one of the most memorable and epic disasters of our time. Over 1,500 people lost their lives on the night of April 15, 1912. The ship took two hours and 40 minutes to sink. It carried only 20 lifeboats with enough room for 1,178 passengers, even though full capacity held 2,228 passengers. One of the most tragic facts, however, about the sinking of the Titanic is that it could have been prevented. The first ice warning came in around nine o'clock the morning of the collision. Several more warnings followed throughout the day but the wireless operator, Harold Bride, was swamped with personal messages from the Titanic's passengers. There was never enough time to deliver the ice warnings to the bridge. In addition, the two lookouts on duty the night of the collision were not equipped with binoculars, which made it even more difficult to see obstacles on the flat sea.

The Titanic can be used not only as a parable for our time but also as a parable for the changes and challenges facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) today. I think it is important to note that I do not think the ELCA is on a direct course for the bottom of the ocean. The ELCA is clearly sailing through the ice field of its time, but unlike the Titanic, the ELCA has lookouts with binoculars in the form of the youth. The ELCA has the opportunity to have the warnings sent to the bridge, to make sure that the voices of the future are heard, and that every opinion and viewpoint is taken into account. We cannot rush into our conclusions or the church will end up in a disaster.

The largest iceberg of our time, the one that the Lutheran church is steaming toward right now, is that of homosexuality and the church. This issue was debated and voted on during the Churchwide Assembly in Florida. The questioning and debating over whether non-celibate homosexuals will be allowed to become registered clergy in the Lutheran church has been a hot topic for quite some time. The ELCA is one of the more open and accepting churches today in terms of providing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people the same opportunities as others. However, no people deserve to be treated as second-class citizens. Frank Petrovic

told the voting delegates that he was called to be a pastor when he was in eighth grade and that he is also gay. Frank said, "I am told I am a member of the body of Christ, welcome to full participation, so which human being has the right to tell me that because of who I love my call from God is not valid?"

The ELCA's stance on homosexuality in the church is as follows:

"As compared with most Evangelical denominations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's policy concerning homosexuality is both open and clear. Homosexuals are invited to be full members, to share in the sacraments, and to be treated in all ways as heterosexuals. They may even be ordained and called as clerics, serving in pulpits and other ministries. But homosexual conduct is considered sin, and those who would be ministers must refrain from such conduct, and must promise as much if their homosexuality is known."

The issue of whether a person of GBLT orientations may be called as a registered pastor in the Lutheran church is directly connected with the decision to affirm same-sex unions. If a person is in a loving and committed relationship with another and they wish to have that union recognized before God, then they should not be held back. The Bible reminds us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and to quote from the ELCA Studies on Sexuality, Part: Two: "none of us can live a God pleasing life of obedience apart from God's grace and favor, the question of sin in homosexual relationships pertains to whether or not they are living in faith active in love." The people who advocate same-sex unions do so in the light and knowledge that those entering in the union will follow the same teachings shown through the Bible and that are followed by those engaged in heterosexual marriage traditions.

The Titanic sank because of an iceberg. That fact is difficult, if not impossible, to refute. However, what must also be taken into account are the circumstances surrounding the collision with the iceberg, what precautions, or lack thereof, were taken, and what happened in the pivotal moments directly after the impact.

While the general consensus as to why the Titanic sank is, "the ship hit an iceberg," the sinking



actually resulted from a whole series of circumstances. Factors that led to the sinking of the Titanic include: the speed and angle of the impact into the iceberg, the temperature of the water, the quality and makeup of the steel hull and rivets in 1912, the unusual position of the ice field during that period, the number and placement of the punctures in the six forward compartments, and the awareness of the crew. While the Titanic did hit an iceberg, if it were not for the events leading to and resulting from the actual impact, the Titanic probably would not have sunk.

The ELCA is facing what may be its largest and most dangerous iceberg right now in the form of the debate and voting that took place in Florida. The audacity to believe that we, as humans, may decide for everyone who God chooses to accept and reject based on our own personal opinions and values will only lead to trouble. However, other icebergs are also on the horizon. Cloning and medical issues, such as the definition of death in light of our ability to keep people alive with machines long after their bodies no longer function is very relevant to our lives and the church today. The daily destruction of our ecology and the environment is yet another iceberg that we, as a church, will have to face in the years to come.

Just before 11:40 p.m. on April 14, 1912, the alarm bell rang twice and the newly installed phone rang beside the helm on the bridge of the Titanic. First Officer William Murdoch answered and heard the lookout Fredrick Fleet yell the famous line, "Iceberg, right ahead!" Then acting completely on intuition with only seconds to spare, he threw the switch that notified the engine workers at the bottom of the ship to throw the engines into stop and reverse. These actions to slow the ship and aid the turning was an attempt to avoid the iceberg. Unfortunately, the ship was too large to turn fast enough to miss the burg and it scraped along the starboard side just below the water line. Rivets popped and the Titanic began taking in water.

Another interesting fact about the Titanic is that if the ship had hit the iceberg straight on, she probably would not have sunk. This is because she was fitted with a double hull. The iceberg would have cut through the first layer but not the second layer of the double hull. The ship would have survived the crash and probably would have been able to crawl into New York's harbor. However, the builders wanted more room for passengers and storage so they chose not to put a double bottom

on the ship. When the Titanic turned to avoid the iceberg, the whole side of the ship was ripped open because there was only one layer of steel instead of two.

The ELCA is facing its own icebergs right now, but if we hit them head on then there is a chance that we will not only be able to crawl through but we will have smooth sailing. The youth of the ELCA are standing at the helm right now. The youth are the future of the church and their help in deciding which path the ELCA will take in the future is necessary. The fact that the Titanic had a double hull and not a double bottom was the result of poor planning. The fact that the enjoyment of the passengers came before their safety was also poor planning. One can also take into account that the average person considered the Titanic "unsinkable" because it was so large and beautiful. The ELCA, I hope, will take more care than the builders of the Titanic did in constructing the future of the church. Like the Titanic, right now the ELCA appears unsinkable, but depending upon which icebergs we encounter in the future that could change. We must not only confront these barriers that seem to be blocking our path, but we also need to find a way to work around them peacefully and with full inclusion of all those who are members of the priesthood of all believers. If we wish to continue as a church whose mission statement is as welcoming and open and the one that follows:

"The mission (purpose) of the church of Jesus Christ does not change over time, even though we may need new words to express it in new times. If we take our cues from the New Testament, the ELCA's mission statement should speak of proclaiming the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ so that people may believe and be baptized and then, as members of the body of Christ, serve him through proclamation/witness/teaching and doing works of love and mercy."

This mission statement clearly shows that the ELCA is a welcoming place. The mission of the Church doesn't change over time. We may need, however, new words to express it in new times. The church is an ever-changing place. Both new and old ideas will continue to mix together to form what we hope will be the double bottom on our church, which will ensure the ELCA smooth sailing.



# DO YOU WANT FRIES WITH THAT?

by Rachel Kuik, Lino Lakes, Minn.

It's safe to say that almost everyone in the world has heard of a lovely little place called McDonalds. The restaurant is full of choices. You can have Big Macs, Chicken McNuggets, Fish Sandwiches, and many other things. However, there is no debate regarding what food is the most popular at this well-known restaurant because the answer is French fries. When entering a camp like the Summer Vocation Institute at Augsburg College you begin to realize the numerous possibilities at your doorstep. Vocation is a calling, and what is yours? Just as you can choose from Big Macs and Chicken McNuggets, life presents choices of professions such as a pastor or teacher. The numerous possibilities regarding what you can do and what God is calling you to do can leave you feeling confused or overwhelmed; however, one thing is for sure, you can always answer yes to God: the Biggie Fries. All of us make huge choices when deciding what our vocation is. In reality, however, the big question is: Do you want fries with that?

When I was a younger kid, McDonalds was quite the treat. I would always order the Kid's Meal, but I remember *always* complaining that my fries were smaller than my mom's. I knew I could eat just as many fries as her and I always got flustered about it. The same situation occurs in churches and places around the world. People don't expect that a kid or a teenager can have as much to say about their faith as an adult would. "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity" (1st Timothy 4:12). God knows that although teenagers like me may not always have the perfect words or the most knowledge, but we have a faith that can be just as strong as any adult. God calls us when we are young. Our vocation starts with Him at that point, not just when our parents think that we are old enough to have the "Biggie Fries."

When I go through the drive-through at McDonalds I must admit that I get slightly overwhelmed. I feel a lot of pressure because of all the options available on that colorful board. It's hard to choose what I'm in the mood for right at that moment and sometimes I pull away wishing I had ordered something else. Life presents us with many different options as well and it is hard to choose which path is right for you. Not only is it hard to decide what you want, but it is also hard to consider what you think God would want for you and what He is calling you to do. The most important thing to remember is that it is okay to change your mind. You don't have to choose one meal, and get that every time you go to McDonalds. You can switch from one to the other. Your calling and your vocation are not necessarily your career. Vocation has many elements. It is constant and it is ordinary. You have many different callings throughout your life and you aren't always preparing for them but they are occurring now! It is simply part of your everyday life. God won't set you up



for failure. You may feel as though you have failed every once in a while, but it's all part of a bigger plan. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The great thing about McDonalds is, no matter which meal you choose, it's always a simple and easy process to add fries to it!

If McDonalds only had one meal, one option ...it definitely would not be as successful as it is. It presents many different options for all different kinds of people. Everyone has a different vocation and God loves that. He loves the variety! Just because your best friend is always at church and volunteering, these things alone do not make him or her a better Christian than you. Your vocation is more than just going to do something; it is also something inside of you, a passion, and a desire to show your love for your God. God has chosen each and every one of us specifically, we all belong to Him and are all living our lives for Him once we allow ourselves to be welcomed into His kingdom. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). God is always offering Himself to us and is always with us, we just need to stop and notice.

Vocation is part of our daily life, it is always occurring and we each contribute to creating the big masterpiece that God has created through us. Each of us, from young to old, has been chosen. We all have something to offer. Each of us should be seen as equally full of God's love and compassion: the Biggie Fries. We all struggle to find what God is calling us to do. Vocation is more than just a career; it is how we live our daily lives. God never sets us up for failure. He loves us and creates many options for us to show His love to others as He has shown it to us. You don't have to choose one meal for the rest of your life. You can switch from one to the other. Finally, each of us has a different vocation. God has blessed us all with different talents and abilities to shine His light. He has chosen each of us to shine His light, so it's a good thing that each of us has different ways to do so. Vocation is daily, so my challenge to you is think of the love God gives you next time you pass a McDonalds, and always say yes to the Biggie Fries.



# HINDUISM'S EFFECT ON INDIAN SOCIETY

by LaKrista Koegel, Turtle Lake, Wisc.

In a society of mixed cultures and religions, misunderstandings and preconceptions will arise. In recognizing differences, people of different backgrounds can understand dissimilarities and better relate with one another. However, when religion comes into play, it becomes difficult to draw conclusions. Such is the case with Hinduism. Though it is the third largest religion in the world, many people of other religions don't understand what Hinduism is, what Hindus believe, and how a single religion can be so prevalent in the whole of the society. In recognizing how Hinduism came to be and what Hindus believe, it becomes easier to see just how profound Hinduism affects all of Indian culture and society.

In order to understand the religion, its general history and background must first be known. Although Hindus believe that their faith had no beginning and is eternal, the roots of this religion can be found in the Indus River Valley in present-day India. It is believed that Aryans migrated from the area of Iraq to this river valley, bringing with them their religious practices and the tales, songs, and ceremonial instructions that later became the literature of the *Vedas*. The information that is now in the *Vedas* was passed on by word of mouth from one generation to the next for many centuries before being written down. Holy men who studied the texts formed different ways to think about God, and therefore, different spiritual paths were formed, each emphasizing a different way to free the soul from *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation) to achieve *moksha*. The three different paths include: a path of devotion to God in which a relationship is formed between the person and one of the many deities of Hinduism, a path of spiritual understanding and knowledge in which a person meditates deeply in the attempt to become one with God (Brahman), and a path of selfless service and action in which the person rids themselves of all selfish and material things and devotes their life to Brahman by showing acts of kindness to others.

These paths show the spiritual aspect of Hinduism, but this religion also makes itself very prevalent in the society that Hindus live in, primarily in India. Hindu society is formed into four main *varnas*, or classes. These classes make up what is called the caste system.

Each person has a hereditary caste and an occupational caste. The four *varnas* include Brahmins (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (rulers and soldiers), Vaishyas (farmers and traders), and Shudras (workers and craftspeople). The *varna* that a person is in depends on whom they were born to. For example, if the parents of a child were Kshatriyas, then the child would also be a Kshatriya. Each person's *varna* greatly influences their vocation by giving each person the idea that they are meant for one specific type of occupation and lifestyle. There are also many subdivisions beneath each *varna* due to mixed marriages and the many different occupations. People of higher *varnas* generally do not socialize with people from low *varnas*, although this is becoming less noticeable, especially in large cities,



due to the influence of Western Civilization. In past times however, and still today in rural areas, a person's hereditary caste can determine what is permissible and what is forbidden, such as what that person should eat, whom they should marry, and how they should behave toward members of other castes.

Even below the Shudras are another group of people, which actually make of the majority of the Hindu population, but are not considered part of the caste system. This group is called the "untouchables." The untouchables hold jobs that would be considered extremely unsanitary and unhealthy, and they are generally poorer and less educated than other Hindus. The untouchables also suffer from some discrimination in housing and employment, even though it became illegal in India to discriminate against people because of their social caste in 1962.

Due to the grouping of people into classes, as well as the idea of karma, there is a sense of futility for life. Karma is the belief that the status of all Hindus in any span of life has been determined by their behavior in a previous existence and that they are paying for their past wrongdoings. If one were considered an untouchable, one would accept it and most likely not try to change anything about it. Hindus are also guided by dharma—duty, law, and obligation—and accepting one's lot in life. One would not try to better oneself because one would believe that one is an untouchable because one did something wrong in a past life to deserve it. This whole idea causes a rut in which a society cannot move forward because everyone is too accepting of the way things are, and not of what could possibly be.

Hindu culture does allow for rebellion for "righteous causes," and protest against poverty does fit in this title. Some rebels have brought about political change, but they have never sought to change the existing caste system, since it is such a large part of the Hindu religion. Since World War II, however, some improvement has been shown to the untouchables due to the changes brought about by Mahatma Gandhi, Hindu's great leader of India's pre-independence days. Gandhi brought about changes by peaceful means instead of using force or violence.

"An armed soldier relies on his weapons for his strength. Take away from him his weapons—his gun or his sword, and he generally becomes helpless. But a person who has truly realized the principle of nonviolence has the God-given strength for his weapon and the world has not known anything that can match it ... 'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world."

—Mahatma Gandhi

During Gandhi's life he violated the caste restriction that had previously prohibited association with the untouchables and persuaded many Hindus to allow the untouchables to worship with them in their temples. He also fasted 17 times as political acts. During one fast in 1932, he said that he was willing to die in protest against the way Indian society treated the untouchables. His example helped to decrease the prejudice that existed between members of different castes and was also an important factor in India's constitution prohibiting discrimination against the untouchables. Laws have since been placed reserving places for untouchables in educational institutions, legislatures, and government. However, improvement is slow, especially in rural areas where it is difficult for untouchables to blend in with the rest of the population and where long-standing traditions and customs are more likely to be rigidly followed.

Today not all Hindus are as affected by the caste system as some are, however, all



Hindus are indeed affected by *ashramas*. *Ashramas* are each of the four stages of life that a Hindu is to go through. Every stage is a different vocation that a person is expected to experience. Each *ashrama* is greatly influenced by dharma, instead of a fixed set of beliefs. In the case of *ashramas*, “Dharma are the duties that support a person’s spiritual (eternal) and human (temporary) nature” (Teece, Religion in Focus—Hinduism). The first *ashrama* is the student stage (*Brahmacharya*) in which a person not only attends school to learn basic subjects, but also the ancient scriptures. In the past, students left home to study under a guru for eight years, but now children just attend a regular school. Families of the three highest varnas typically only practice this ashrama. The second stage of life is that of householder (*Grihastha*). During this stage a person is expected to earn a living and provide for the family. It is believed that a person cannot achieve *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation) without acknowledging the responsibilities of daily life first. The third stage is retirement (*Vanaprastha*). This stage usually commences after a son is born to the person’s first son to make sure that the family line will continue. During retirement, a person’s *dharma* becomes more spiritual as they study the scriptures and begin a path less of earthly attachments and more of meditation. The final *ashrama* is followed by very few Hindus, but is considered an ideal. This stage is world renouncer (*Sannyasa*). During this stage a person is expected to give up all of their possessions and become a nomadic holy person with the sole purpose of concentrating on *moksha*.

Though it may be difficult for people of non-Hindu belief to see why people would want to worship in a religion in which one’s future is laid out in front of them, it is the way Hindus were brought up and it meets the spiritual and philosophical needs of its followers. Whether it is through dharma, karma, or the caste system, Hinduism has a far-reaching affect on its believers by influencing vocation and social status throughout life.

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As I sit down to write this paper and consider all the people I've spoken to about this topic, I've concluded that the best way I can see to write this is as an editorial piece. This paper will be written as a compilation of opinions and the reasons behind them, followed up by my own views. Elements of the Bible as written by the apostle Paul, personal experience, and all sorts of branches of the Christian Church (not specified) will be used. I write this prologue to say that some of this paper may be offensive and/or disturbing.

## HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE CHURCH

by Betsy Narr, Edina, Minn.

*"We are not illegitimate children,' they protested. 'The only Father we have is God himself.'" John 8:41*

The apostle Paul was said to be a vessel through which the Lord God spoke. His letters from jail are immortalized in the Bible and on laminated posters in Sunday school room walls worldwide. However, Paul's words ought not to be confused with God's or Jesus' as they often seem to be. Based on his personal beliefs, Paul wrote 12 letters about how women, slaves, and the elderly ought to be regarded in the church. Roughly 2,000 years later these letters are working to alienate God-fearing Christians from the church. Romans, I Corinthians, and I Timothy make this especially true for the homosexual community.

First, I will concentrate on the book of Romans. Romans has very famous and inspirational quotes (6:8, 14:13, 15:7), which one may hear in a Sunday lesson of a suburban church. These quotes aren't all this letter contains. Romans also contains many warnings about sin: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all because all sinned" (Romans 5:13). As far as homosexuality is concerned, Romans is chalk full of warnings:

"Because of this [losing God], God gave them over to sinful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with woman and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received themselves due penalty for their perversion" (Romans 1:26-27).

This verse is followed up with and sandwiched between what will happen to those who commit sodomy. "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block of retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever" (Romans 11: 9-10).

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1: 18). I wonder if we'll ever hear a pastor preach on these words, clarifying their deeper meaning. The longer we ignore passages like this, the more they will be feared and misread.

Second, I will focus on the book of I Corinthians. This book is seeping with more "true God-fearers do this" and "true God-fearers do that." This is what it says about



homosexuality: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral ... nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards ... will inherit the kingdom of God” (I Corinthians 6:9). Somewhat contrastingly, this book also has chapter 14 verse 34 to its name, which reads, “Woman should remain silent in the church. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”

It seems the Christian church, with some exceptions, including the Catholic branch, has dismissed this “rule” and has ordained woman pastors and given them high ranks in the church. If they can disregard this “law” in modern day, what’s stopping them from dismissing their equally unfair homosexual laws? If there were as many gays as there are women, would gays have a better chance?

I Timothy is the last book that will be mentioned. I Timothy 1:10 states: “[the law is] For adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars, and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.” This verse is stated in a paragraph that says that the law only pertains to the unrighteous. This leads me to believe that Paul is saying it’s only a sin to be a homosexual if one is unrighteous and unlawful, but if one is lawful and righteous then it is not a sin to be homosexual.

There are more letters from Paul in the Bible, but these three books seem to be the most prevalent in rules, laws, and codes. Considering all of these versus, including ones that I didn’t mention, it’s no wonder that homosexuals feel alienated from the church. The very book with which the church is based off of is seemingly against them.

Thirty people, ages 15 to 20, from various sexual backgrounds who consider themselves Christian, were surveyed about homosexuality in the church. All of them defined homosexuality as “neither right nor wrong.” Twenty-four of them said that it is something that should definitely be embraced by the church. Ten out of 30 people left a comment at the end of the survey. All of these comments contained sentences along the lines of, “something as taboo as homosexuality should be recognized by a pastor,” “Gay Christians need all the support they can get, why should they be shunned by their sexual preferences?” “Church is one of the only places to find sanctuary this day in age, why should people be turned away from the one place they can turn to?” Twelve of them said they didn’t believe the Bible. They said the Bible is “a great piece of literature,” pointing out that it was “written by regular people” and “disgustingly misinterpreted from the first translations.” The 18 who said they believed “a majority of the Bible” agreed that it was misinterpreted and often outdated. All of the 30 said that no one should feel alienated from the church, but all the participants said that people are and do feel alienated from the church.

More comments were left by the gay teens who took the survey. There is one story that needs to be shared involving an 18-year-old named Zach, a gay teen. This part is a little graphic. Zach was in confirmation in ninth grade, he felt comfortable and close to a small group of people in his confirmation class. His whole class went on a retreat and stayed overnight in a church. Before bed on the second night, Zach shared with his close friends that he was gay. Of the four he told, one seemed very uneasy about it, making an excuse to leave the room. Zach thought nothing of it and went to bed next to the other three, the fourth slept clear across the room. At around four in the morning Zach woke up to find his face sticky and wet and a boy named Chris masturbating over him. Apparently, a few of the



boys had taken turns ejaculating on Zach's face. Zach ran to the bathroom, followed by a confirmation leader. The confirmation leader quickly figured out what happened. The boys were all sent home and their parents were told what happened. Obviously the friend that seemed put-off by the news Zach shared with him was the one that told the other kids about Zach's homosexuality; a week later that same friend came out of the closet. Zach is now a college student doing well and very involved in Christian groups and Gay Pride groups.

Personally, I feel that homosexuals are alienated from the Church. I think that most people would say the same thing. I feel the root of this alienation stems not from the Bible itself, but the people who read the Bible and take it upon themselves to play that part of the judge. The biggest lesson in the Christian church is "God loves you so you may love others." That's it. One's job as a Christian is to embrace everyone for who they are in Jesus' name. It is not anyone's job to condemn, throw stones, or shun. It shouldn't matter if a person is black, white, purple, straight, gay, man, woman, transgender, old, young, etc., if one wants to be involved in a church. All it should take for one to be accepted in a church is a want to be accepted. It is then the Church's duty to take that person in and recognize that person as a child of God. We are all children of God, all chosen to be his children. He has made us unique and special solely so we can share our gifts with others in Christ's name.





# VOCATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

by Brandon Nelson, Stillwater, Minn.

Some of the most important social issues of our times that have received the most media attention such as life or death and who gets to choose—abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, etc., and the concept of a just or unjust war, who one can spend one's life with (gay marriage)—are getting an overdose of “religious values.” To the best of my knowledge, the one issue that has received little attention, with respect to religion, is the environment. The environment is probably one of the few topics that no one likes to bring God into. I'm not saying that those who make religion a talking point don't already pick and choose what issue they would like to play the “God card” on, but this is one issue which could use a healthy dose of “religious values” and, in my case, Christian values. Some would argue that nothing is wrong with the environment, that it is as strong as ever, and that it is practically invincible. I beg to differ. The question that I pose is simply this: “Should we, as Christians, care about the environment?” I will not debate the issue of whether the environment needs our help in my paper, but rather I will make the point of why we should care.

In Genesis, God made humankind the stewards of creation. God made the earth and said it was good. This is a simple statement of fact, and I would agree. There is more to the Book of Genesis, however, than the act of creation. God gave humankind control over everything, which is an enormous amount of responsibility. Think about this accomplishment: in six days of working, toiling, and with a great deal of design, God brought a world into being and then handed it over to humankind. To some, that might seem like a free pass. After all, Genesis 3:27-29 states, “[S]o God created them in his own image. God patterned them after himself, male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said ‘Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish and birds and all the animals.’” As Psalm 24 states: “The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it.” I think this might be a misunderstanding. Did God say “subdue” the earth? If you look at the original translation of the word “dominion” from Genesis you get *radhah*. However, in every other part of the Bible where the word is used, *radhah* exclusively refers to a king or leader who rules through benevolence and love and whose reign brings about prosperity. This word is never used to describe someone such as the pharaoh of Egypt or King Herod, for example. Since we're no longer subduing the earth, what are we doing? If we look again at Genesis we see God refer to Adam as a steward of God's garden. In Genesis 3:15, the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it. That sounds rather benevolent—setting humankind as a steward of God's garden. If we are really only stewards of this planet, we must take care of it. This planet belongs to God, and God said it was good. Therefore, showing God's love for nature and his creation is good. God's love for something is the only reason we should need to love, tend, and take the utmost care of it.

Often, we see in the Bible that God shows he cares for nature. Many fine examples of this include the Psalms such as Psalm 104, which reads: “May the glory of the Lord last forever. The Lord rejoices in all that he has made and the earth trembles at his glance, the mountains tremble at his touch. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live.”

In order to better understand God's intrinsic care for nature one must have one defining belief—God doesn't make mistakes. Our steadfast belief in God demands the faith of a child at times to trust God's judgment. With that said, how can we see the earth as God



sees it when we interact with the environment in a negative way? We start a ripple effect when we let pesticides make their way into the Great Lakes, for example. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but we are paying for it now. It's like the butterfly flapping its wings on one end of the earth and causing a tidal wave on the other side. I'm not saying we must walk on eggshells all day long. We must remember, however, our understanding of this world and how it functions is nothing compared to God's. God challenges anyone who thinks otherwise as demonstrated in Job 40:2: "Do you still want to argue with the almighty? You are God's critic, but do you have the answers?" Job responds to the Lord by saying: "I will put my hand over my mouth, I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say." This stern rebuking that Job receives from God is slightly out of context, so I will explain. God spoke to Job through a whirlwind and at that time the Lord challenged Job's wisdom, asking God many questions. Examples of this include: Job 39:1-2, "When does a mountain goat give birth?" Job 40 19-20, "Who gave the horse its strength?" Job 39:5-6, "Who makes the wild donkey wild?" Job, of course, cannot answer these questions, but God can. His wisdom knows no bounds; all things of this earth are under his watchful gaze. What the verse is telling us is God knows all these things. Matthew 11:29 states, "Not even a sparrow worth only half a penny can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it; and the very hairs on your head are numbered." Omnipotence is what it amounts to. But it's not just about knowing. It's about loving. I know that rattlesnakes have a venomous pouch in the mouth that secretes a strong neurotoxin. This certainly doesn't mean I love rattlesnakes.

One might say that God's knowledge of nature and his love of it are two separate things. However, the Bible states many times that God loves this earth from his declaration of its goodness in Genesis to Proverbs 8:29-30. "God delights in his creation and desires its wholeness and well being." We need only read the Psalms for a final word. Psalm 148 reads: "Let every created thing give praise to the Lord for he issued his command and they came into being and he established them forever and forever and his order will never be revoked." God doesn't make mistakes, and he created all living things on this planet. Everyone has been given a spark of the divine. They are God's and they share a bond with us. We are all part of God's creation. Humans must understand that they are not above the environment, and it was not created for our amusement. We are active and participating members in God's creation. This means that, like all creatures, we give and we take. We must be careful to not take more than we give. We play the single most important role in God's creation. We play the role of stewards of the environment. We are only housekeeping.

I don't know when this will happen, but if you believe Revelations, then you also believe Christ is coming back. Yep, he's coming back to His earth and the key word being HIS earth. When He does, Paul tells us in Romans 8:18-25: "The whole creation will inherit God's glory when he returns." We are temporarily here on this planet and it belongs to someone far greater than us, and He's watching us. He has seen the clear cutting and the asbestos dumping and the mercury in the water (His water mind you). This planet is not ours. If it was ours I would still hope we would take care of it, but because it's God's I understand we are truly being bad housekeepers. The ELCA puts it best with their statement on the environment:

"Christians are not given license to dominate and exploit the earth but a special responsibility. We should reflect God's way of ruling as a shepherd king who takes the form of a servant." We may not be this planet's owner, but we do have Radhah over it, and as kings of this earth we must serve it as Christ served us and take off our crowns and become its servants as well."



# CONNECTING MUSIC AND VOCATION



by Megan Dowd, Eagan, Minn.

I'll be the first to admit it—I am a Type A personality with perfectionist tendencies. I like hustle and bustle. I like keeping myself busy. My thoughts are always whizzing around. Most of all, I always like having something going on in the background. Doing my thing during the day in silence just does not work out for me. Thanks to Marconi, I have a host of music at my fingertips at the touch of my radio dial. I can have everything from hard rock to country; I can have easy listening and punk pop one after another. It struck me not too long ago that I was not alone in my love of music. Nearly every American listens to the stereo in their car while out and about. Music is in our headphones, in our stereos, in our worship, and in our lives. Music touches the soul, grabbing that which we cannot put a name to. To quote Victor Hugo, "Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent." There is something in music that connects people, a natural rhythm perhaps mixed with the Holy Spirit. It is quite possible that through music, the Holy Spirit can touch one, and in doing so, give a sense of calling on a simple day-to-day basis.

"What is it about music?" I'm asking rhetorically. I know there's a lot "about" music. But what do certain songs hold over others? Why does one song make my mother tear up, while I remain unmoved? Why does one melody invite contemplation, while another demands movement? It's amusing for me to look back on all the music I've collected over the years. My parents are big music fans so I remember when I was little I danced with my dad and brother to classics like The Beatles, Fleetwood Mac, The Eagles, and maybe a track or two from The Moody Blues. My brother, even before he became too cool to dance around to the music, would urge

my mom to "turn on the 'Noody Blues.'" Looking back, or listening back if you will, I now hear lyrics and music. When I was little, however, I could not care less about people singing in the background. If the song had a good dance beat and a melody that I liked, then I wanted to hear it as much as I could. The point I'm trying to make is simple: I connected with music, as my mom, dad, and brother each did. There was something about it that drew us in, taking control of our limbs, inviting us to move and enjoy the blend of melodies.

I think back to one chapter in my AP European History class, when we were learning about romanticism. I felt an intense connection with aspects of romanticism. The key feature was the romantic's love of deep, emotional music. Remember those guys named Beethoven and Chopin? They were Romantics, through and through. Music was about feeling, about communicating emotions, an "outburst of the soul" as Frederick Delius said. In many respects, not much has changed. Teenagers today still connect music with emotions. At the Summer Vocation Institute, I decided to test my theory that music and emotion often walk hand in hand. Every person that I spoke to said the same basic statement: music touches in a very personal, and at times, spiritual way. There was something about it that clicked. After talking for a couple minutes with each person, I had them listen to a song that I personally find very moving. I wanted to see how others reacted. Every person that listened to the song said that there was something about it that moved them, but they couldn't quite name it. Sure, the key that it was in helped, and the tempo was rather reflective, but there was something "glorious" about the whole song. The Holy Spirit perhaps ... ?

A favorite quotation of mine is: "Bach gave us God's Word, Mozart gave us God's Laughter, Beethoven gave us God's Fire; God gave us music so we might pray without words." So true, so true. Look to the Bible if it doesn't seem feasible for

<sup>1</sup> List taken from The Life Application Study Bible, 1996, pg 653.



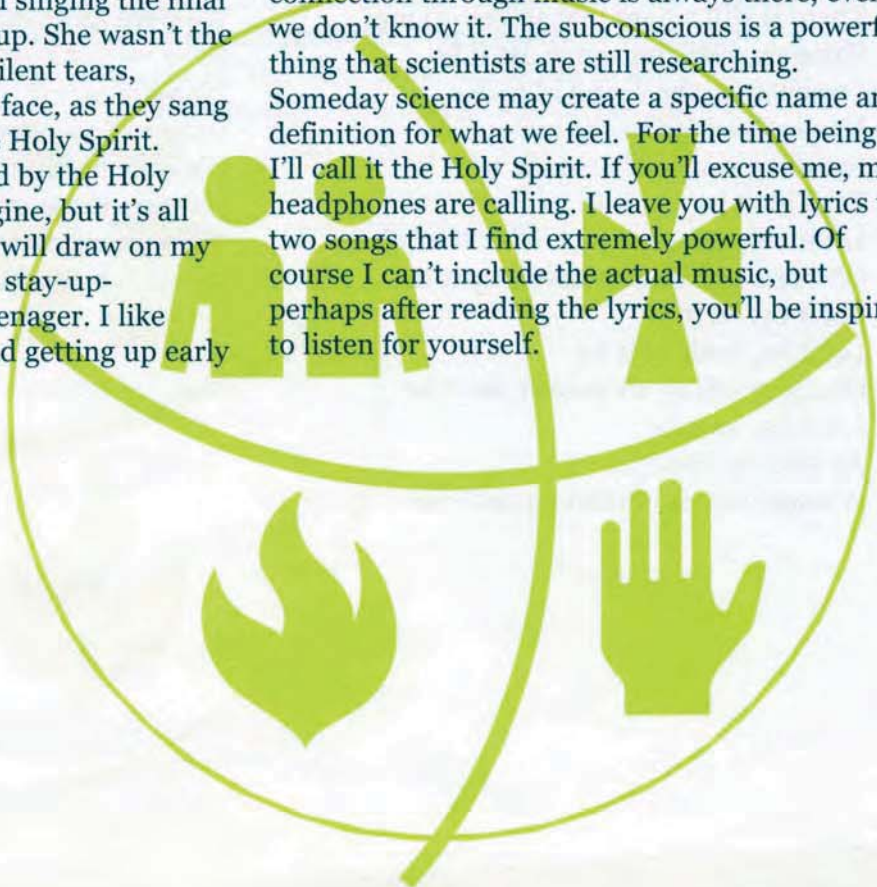
music to connect God to us. Miriam sings and dances to praise God, Jericho fell to the sound of horns, Saul was soothed by music, Paul and Silas sang and made music in jail. The list goes on and on.<sup>1</sup> Look to the book of Psalms for that matter. It's an entire book of the Bible devoted to music, songs, and praise to God. Music is connected spiritually in so many ways and has continued to do so for thousands of years. Now with our fancy iPods and MP3 players, any music is just a touch away. Daily contact with music may fulfill our daily conscious need for sound and our subconscious daily need for the Holy Spirit.

Worship was a part of every day at the Summer Vocation Institute. Each day was a different form and experience for worship, but one thing remained constant—the music. Though the styles worship were worlds apart, music was an essential part of each service. Sometimes it was a small, reflective melody on the guitar, other times it was a pulsing band beat that begged to be danced to. Sometimes the music was even camp songs. Nevertheless, it was music we lifted to God and connected with God. Personally, I would not have had as moving of an experience without the musical accompaniment. I am reminded of one event that my friend LaKrista recounted to me when I was talking with people about the enigmatic nature of music. She remembered worship at camp one year. It was a time for quiet reflection, and as they all started singing the final song, she felt tears start to well up. She wasn't the only one. The room was full of silent tears, streaming down every camper's face, as they sang and were moved together by the Holy Spirit.

The campers were moved by the Holy Spirit. It may seem hard to imagine, but it's all real, I assure you. Once again, I will draw on my personal life. I'm not the typical stay-up-late/sleep-into-the-afternoon teenager. I like going to bed before midnight and getting up early

(and by early I mean 7:30 or 8 a.m.). Such was the plan last night: I would go to bed between 10 and 10:30 p.m., and get up at 7:30 a.m. Instead, I didn't get to sleep until after midnight, due to music composition. I had a blend of irresistible melodies that wouldn't stop, and I've learned from past experience that if I don't play them out, I'll lose them all. So at 11:15 last night I traipsed into the computer room to plug out the melodies from my head to my fingertips (thank goodness for volume control on the electric keyboard). All in all, I didn't get to bed until way after midnight. But when inspiration strikes, what can you do? Last night was not my ideal night. I would have loved to just sleep, sleep, sleep. Instead, I felt so moved to compose music, and only music would be able to draw me from my bed and over to the piano.

So, music touches us and relaxes us, but how does it all relate to vocation, right? The fact is music does touch us, it does relax us. When we are at such a peace, how can we ignore the Holy Spirit? Call it what you want (in my Stress Assessment class they called it "homeostasis"), the point remains: when listening to music we can feel a connection to God, and through this connection can attain a sense of our calling. It may be a small thing like deciding to volunteer at a church daycare. It may be as big as deciding to major in political science. This day-to-day connection through music is always there, even if we don't know it. The subconscious is a powerful thing that scientists are still researching. Someday science may create a specific name and definition for what we feel. For the time being, I'll call it the Holy Spirit. If you'll excuse me, my headphones are calling. I leave you with lyrics to two songs that I find extremely powerful. Of course I can't include the actual music, but perhaps after reading the lyrics, you'll be inspired to listen for yourself.





## Let it Be (Lennon/McCartney)

When I find myself in times of trouble  
Mother Mary comes to me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be  
And in my hour of darkness  
She is standing right in front of me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be

And when the broken hearted people  
Living in the world agree  
There will be an answer, let it be  
For though they may be parted  
There is still a chance that they will see  
There will be an answer, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Yeah there will be an answer, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Ah let it be, yeah let it be  
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be

And when the night is cloudy  
There is still a light that shines on me  
Shine on until tomorrow, let it be  
I wake up to the sound of music,  
Mother Mary comes to me  
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be  
Yeah let it be, let it be  
Let it be, yeah let it be  
Oh there will be an answer, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Let it be, yeah let it be  
Oh there will be an answer, let it be  
Let it be, let it be  
Ah let it be, yeah let it be  
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be

## Meant To Live (Switchfoot)

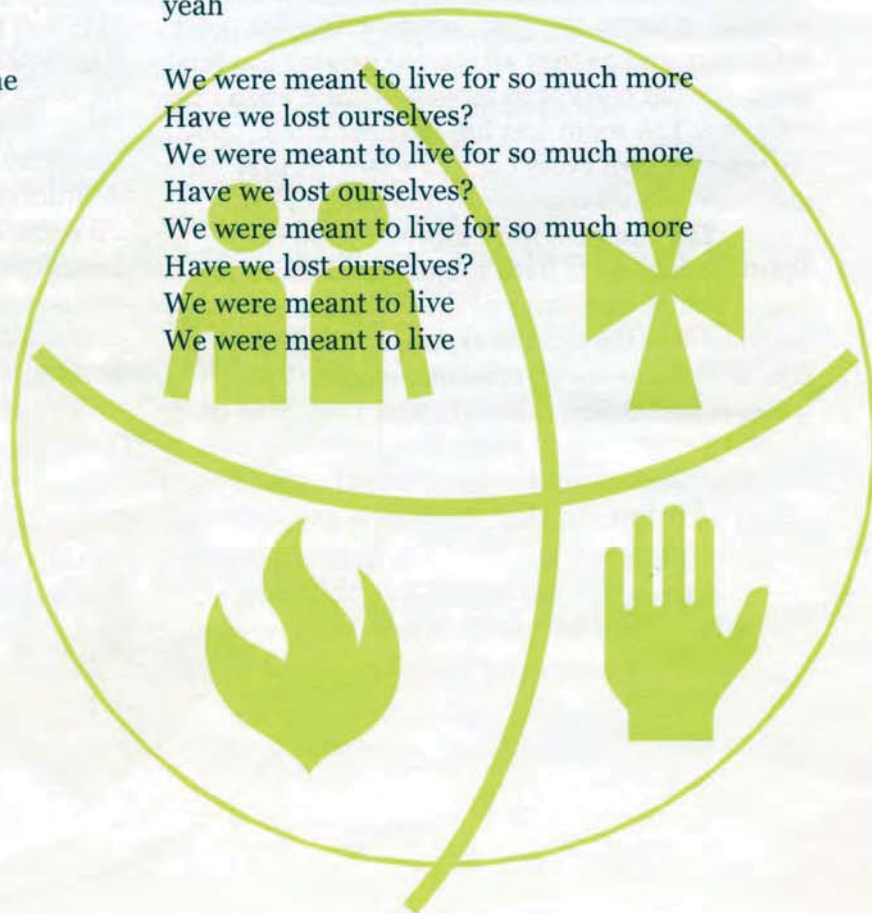
Fumbling his confidence  
And wondering why the world has passed him by  
Hoping that he's meant for more than arguments  
And failed attempts to fly, fly

[Chorus]  
We were meant to live for so much more  
Have we lost ourselves?  
Somewhere we live inside  
Somewhere we live inside  
We were meant to live for so much more  
Have we lost ourselves?  
Somewhere we live inside

Dreaming about Providence  
And whether mice or men have second tries  
Maybe we've been livin with our eyes half open  
Maybe we're bent and broken, broken

[Chorus]  
We want more than this world's got to offer  
We want more than this world's got to offer  
We want more than the wars of our fathers  
And everything inside screams for second life,  
yeah

We were meant to live for so much more  
Have we lost ourselves?  
We were meant to live for so much more  
Have we lost ourselves?  
We were meant to live for so much more  
Have we lost ourselves?  
We were meant to live  
We were meant to live





# A STUDY OF RESOURCES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND ADULTS

by Marie Sager, Plymouth, Minn.

I feel very strongly about the needs and feelings of the special needs members in the church. In this paper I will talk about the different resources that deal with special needs and religion, which are readily available to the pastors of the church.

This topic is important to me because I have taught Sunday school for the past four years with two special needs children, Mark and Brandon, in my class. Mark is a child with autism and has some trouble paying attention in class. Sometimes Mark and I have to go out of the class and just sit down for a little bit or I need to go and find his mom because he doesn't want to be in class any more. Most often, he usually is pretty good and he really enjoys the computer lab because there is a program where he can paint things and use his creativity. Also, Mark is very important to me because I love the way everyone treats him. Even though everyone is so nice to him, he still can feel hurt because of his autism. I felt bad to see him go through some of the different topics we discussed this past year in Sunday school, especially the topic of bullying. Brandon, who also has a form of autism, is also very close to my heart because I have taught him for the past two years and have gotten to see him learn and grow. I have also seen how his mom has been impacted by seeing him grow and learn. I also have gotten close with JoLene, the helper person who is always with him in class while his mom in the worship service. It is cool to see how different people react to Brandon because everyone is nice to him even though he really cannot talk. However, he still can sort of communicate with you. Just recently he started to say "hi" and "bye" to me when he comes and leaves our classroom.

Another reason why working with and helping special needs children with their religious education is important to me because my aunt

and a close family friend both teach special education. I have always loved to listen to them talk about how their children learn and grow in classes every day at school. When I become a youth and family minister I will always try to start out the year by reading *You Are Special* by Max Lucado. Ever since I read that book to my aunt, she said that she was going to read it to her special education children at the beginning of the year.

Having a computer available at the church can be very beneficial because there are many different online resources available via the Internet about special education and religion. Some of them are: <[www.faithability.org](http://www.faithability.org)>, <[www.humanlifematters.com](http://www.humanlifematters.com)>, <[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)>, <[www.ccpd.org](http://www.ccpd.org)>, <[www.jrgministries.org](http://www.jrgministries.org)>, and <[www.affpnet.org/public](http://www.affpnet.org/public)>. The faithability Web site has some good links like Friendship Ministries and Hope Haven, Inc. There are a couple of different organizations that help people with disabilities get the right opportunities they deserve in the church. The Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities Web site is <[www.ccpd.org](http://www.ccpd.org)>. It has information on how to make a church accessible to people with disabilities. Some examples of what churches need are a handicapped-accessible bathroom, an elevator for multi-storied buildings, and random spaces in the sanctuary that are designated for wheelchairs. This discourages the seating of people with special needs to be limited to the back of the sanctuary.

JRG Ministries is another organization that helps serve the spiritual needs of people with disabilities. For an example, they hold conferences and meetings for disabled people and their families. Last, <[www.affpnet.org/public](http://www.affpnet.org/public)> is the Alliance for Full Participation and they work to create a better life and environment for everyone.



There are also some books that may be helpful to pastors learning about special needs and disabilities. One major book is the Holy Bible. A book of the Bible that is good is Ecclesiastes. In chapter four, one story explains that it is better for one to have a friend than to be alone, because then one will have more fun (Ecclesiastes 4:9-16). This is an awesome analogy about special needs people and friends in faith because special needs people need faith buddies just as much as you or I would. Another good book of the Bible is Matthew. In chapter 18, Jesus' disciples came to Jesus asking him who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Then Jesus brought over a child and said, "I promise you this. If you don't change and become like a child, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. But if you are as humble as this child, you are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And when you welcome one of these children because of me, you welcome me" (Matthew 18:1-5). To me, this means that we all need to be like children and not judge one another just because of the way we look or act. This is especially important when different people come to church to learn how to be close to God.

Another Bible verse that has to do with not judging people is 1 Samuel 16:7. It says, "People judge others by what they look like, but I judge people by what is in their hearts." Another really good book for a church to have, which deals with learning disabilities is titled *Think About Having a Learning Disability* by Margaret and Peter Flynn. This is a good book because it has many different chapters about living life with a learning disability. It also has different parts throughout the book that Peter Flynn wrote, whom has a learning disability, and how he feels about certain topics like what having a learning disability means, and about speaking out.

Last, one other book that is more for younger children with disabilities is called *Preschool Children with Special Needs* by Lawrence M. Siegel. This book has many different chapters dealing with all different aspects of life

of a child with special needs. One chapter that is important for a church to read is about different environments for learning. Not everyone learns the same, which is also true for people who don't have a disability. So it is important that a church tries many different methods of teaching about Jesus and the Bible. My church currently teaches one lesson through a variety of methods. For example, one topic we did for six weeks was on the Lord's Prayer. The first week we were in the computer lab using a program called QuickVerse Life Application Bible to learn about prayer in general in the Bible. Then the next week we made prayer bread; it was a small biscuit that had four sections. We did this to remember four different kinds of prayer: 1. An Adoration prayer 2. Confession 3. Thanksgiving 4. Supplication. The third week we were in the theatre and watched a PowerPoint presentation on the Lord's Prayer. Next week we made a prayer shawl to use as a prayer helper. The second to last week we were in the youth room and we walked a labyrinth. The last week the children worshipped with their parents. A child can count on one of his better learning styles to be effective with many different methods.

In conclusion, I am very excited to start my life as a youth and family minister so that I can use what I have researched so much about. One way I will use this information will be at whatever church I am working at I will try to get the people who go there to encourage special needs friends and relatives to come to the church. I will also try and set up some teacher aids for special needs children who need constant watching, like Brandon, who has JoLene watching him and learning right along side of him. When JoLene is unable to make it to Sunday school, Brandon sits with his mom out in the Narthex of the church. He gets to go to a worship service every once in a while. I will also get a copy of *Think about Having a Learning Disability* for the church library. Finally, I will try and have as much fun as possible teaching children about the Bible and Jesus.



In conclusion, there are many resources for the church to use when people have special needs that come to the church to learn and praise God. I am very excited to tell my church about these resources so that we can have a better program for helping people with disabilities.

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# THE MOSAIC MASTER: WILL YOU LISTEN TO HIS CALL?

by Lisa Harney, Rochester, Minn.

Many people believe that callings are only of religious nature and automatically assume that when someone is called by God, that person will become a pastor. Those people are wrong. God calls everyone to use the gifts that He has given them, every day. God may call them to any number of professions or circumstances, big or small. God shapes each of us into unique individuals through our experiences, talents, gifts, and passions. God can be regarded as an artist assembling a mosaic for each of us. Through these defining characteristics, we may see a clearer picture of our true calling in life, or our vocation, as God crafts our mosaic piece by piece.

When a mosaic is created, each piece has its own purpose and gives meaning to the overall design. This becomes much more apparent when forming one's own mosaic. While at the Summer Vocation Institute at Augsburg College, our group spent time worshipping in many different forms. One of these forms was creating a mosaic. The definition of a mosaic is: "A picture or decorative design made by setting small colored pieces, as of stone or tile, into a surface." While this definition is "politically" correct, it lacks the necessary information as to why some pieces were left out and others selected to result in a masterpiece. When we created our mosaics, we first made a list of our talents and our vocations in life, from the most simple to the more complicated. From our individual lists, we then proceeded to pick out a tile for each vocation and talent, eventually creating individual masterpieces that meant something to each of us and became a reflection of who we were. God calls each of us, and the way that these callings combine with our experiences shapes us into the masterpiece that God intends.

When a mosaic is started there are pieces that are used that might seem questionable. In the end, without these pieces the overall picture would be incomplete. God calling individuals to use their gifts and talents for His purposes can be traced back centuries, but it isn't always clear what God is truly calling someone to do. One of the more prominent examples is that of Martin Luther. Luther, born in 1483, entered the world at a time of death and judgment. Plagues swept the land killing thousands, and the average life expectancy was a mere 30 years old. At that time, people wanted to be "right" with God because they could die at any moment. The Church told people that God would save everyone who obtained His grace through good works. One could also supposedly be brought into God's favor by buying indulgences from the Church, causing the workers of the Church to be highly profitable. Luther was born into a middle class Catholic family, and with the support of his father, he became a lawyer. It was what he and his parents believed God called him to be, but God had other plans. Luther, frightened in a thunderstorm, promised God that if He would spare his life then he would become a monk. Thus Luther began his new career. As time went by, Luther realized that he did not approve of many practices of the Church. He was disgusted by the idea of buying one's way to heaven through the purchase of indulgences. Eventually, he came to his own conclusion: justification by grace through faith. Through this belief, Luther reasoned that everyone had a calling in life, and that there was nothing that they could do to earn God's grace. People could only have faith that they would go to heaven.

The tiles used in mosaics differ not only in color, but in size as well. Even though we often view larger things or larger works as more important, the smaller, more intricate pieces add a new aspect to the mosaic, and in no way contribute any less than the larger



pieces. Although vocation is often regarded as what we can do as individuals to please God, there is actually a whole different dimension that should be taken into account. Vocation should instead be looked at in three parts: God, self, and the community. All these things are interrelated when being called. God calls people to do big or small things, and gives those people gifts to accomplish God's will. Instead of simply accepting that we have gifts and using those gifts to our own benefit, God asks us to go out into the community to use our gifts. We can then experience God within the community, not just within ourselves, adding to our perception of God. Using our gifts in this way then pleases and gives back to God. It benefits the community and introduces God to others in a positive way. As Mother Theresa once said, "We must not drift away from the humble works, because these are the works nobody will do. They are never too small. We are so small; we look at things in a small way. Even if we do a small thing for somebody, God, being almighty, sees everything as great. For there are many people who can do big things, but there are very few who will do the small things." From this we can better understand how important it is to use our gifts in our community, no matter how small, to serve God. God will not always call us to do the big things in life, but instead may call us to do the small things, because these things please Him just as much, and bring beauty and character into our individual mosaics.

Sometimes we try to add our own pieces to the mosaic, or interpret them the way that we want to see them. There are many voices to listen to in the world, and it is hard to distinguish what God is actually calling us to do compared to what we want to do. In the book of Luke, possessions and materialism are taken into account. When people begin to focus on these things, they stray from what God is calling them to do. In Ecclesiastes, the author argues that life is meaningless. He writes that he tried everything to make him happy in life, yet was unsuccessful, struggling to find a higher purpose other than to die. God, however, has a purpose and plan for everyone, and will use them as He sees fit. As humans, we often focus on the seemingly "meaningless times" and "ungifted people," but even these times and people are there for a reason that God alone knows. In these instances God will allow us to question why but will guide us so that His creation stays complete.

God works in mysterious ways, but we should remember that God doesn't simply throw our mosaics together. Instead, he lovingly shapes each piece to perfection and shapes every tile with a plan in mind. We shouldn't assume that we are on the right path and be satisfied, but rather we should continually challenge ourselves and use all of our gifts to their fullest potential. Luther believed first that his calling was to be a lawyer, and later as a monk, but God had other plans. Instead, He chose Luther, with his talents for preaching and standing up for his beliefs, to revolutionize the Christian religion. However, God knew that without Luther's skills of preaching acquired through law school, and his devotion to Christianity and God through his experiences as a monk, he would never prevail. For that reason, God put those pieces of his experiences on Luther's life "mosaic." Luther interpreted those pieces as he saw them, leading him first one way, and then another, but until the mosaic formed more and more fully, Luther really had no true concept of what God had in store for him.

This is how God works in all of our lives. He has a mosaic for each of us, yet our mosaics are simply pieces in the plan for the world. We all assume that we know what God has in store for us and what our callings are by simply seeing glimpses of one or two pieces He is using in our mosaics, when really He has a much grander plan for us. Each experience, each gift that God has given us, is added to our mosaic to create who we are, and to shape who or what we will become. We aren't given the ability to see the final mosaic, but we are given the ability to trust God and believe that He is at work in our lives, shaping and creating our mosaic each day in a way that is pleasing to Him.



