

## Vocation

The most basic definition of vocation is “calling.” Most people at times in their life wonder, “What does God want me to do? Is there some type of special purpose for my life?” We find the answer in vocation. Usually, people think of a person’s vocation as their job, what they do. That person is a doctor, that one a farmer, that one a cook, etc. But vocation is first about “being” before it is “doing”. 1 Peter 2:9 says, *“But ye are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”* The “being”, the identity, of a Christian is a child of God. The believer is a citizen of God’s Kingdom who ministers (priesthood of all believers) in whatever roles and situations God places them in. So as Christians we have been called out of the darkness of sin into the light of Jesus Christ. In our Baptism God has claimed and marked us as His own.

In this “being”, our identity, God has called us to live for Him and serve others. There are, of course, many things that all Christians will and should do. But there is also a great diversity of gifts (see Romans 12:3-9). Each Christian is a minister (servant), but serves in a variety of ways. The number of careers are many and varied. Some pay more than others (or not at all such as in the role of homemaker). Some have higher standing in the eyes of the world than others. It is Biblical to work to earn a living to have the means to provide for the needs of life (1 Timothy 5:8, 2 Thessalonians 3:10). But it is not Biblical to look down on people for their vocations or to elevate certain people as more important based on the job they hold (Acts 10:34). We see Jesus show love and respect to people of various social standing and vocation. Lutherans have always taught that all honest vocations have equal standing with God. In even the “simple” tasks of life, God cares for His creation. Luther preached in a sermon, *“Our foolishness consists in laying too much stress upon the show of works and when these do not glitter as something extraordinary we regard them as of no value; and poor fools that we are, we do not see that God has attached and bound this precious treasure, namely his Word, to such common works as filial obedience, external, domestic, or civil affairs, so as to include them in his order and command”*.

So even in the case of careers in church work, we cannot say that these people are somehow better or more important to God. In terms of vocation, pastors have the same “being” (a sinner saved by Jesus) as laypeople, but it is in the “doing” that their vocation is unique (preaching and administering the Sacraments). In the following pages you will see several careers in church work that are available in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Not all are called to careers in full-time ministry, but this calling offers many opportunities to serve God and His people. All of these vocations are open to men and women, except for the pastoral office being for men only and deaconesses for women only. In only ordaining men to the ministry, the LCMS is not seeking to be “sexist” or say that women aren’t “talented enough” to be pastors. We are simply holding to the Biblical qualifications for being ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). It is be noted that only a smaller number of men are called and qualified to be pastors as well.

Most people will hold several jobs over the course of their life. So, what does God want me to do? Very simply, to be His child and serve Him and others through the vocation that He has called you to. Prayerfully consider the gifts and passions that God has given you and go forth in faith!

# LCMS

## Church Work Vocations

Ever thought about a career in church work? Want to become a pastor or serve in some other way? What's the next step?

You may think the only way you can serve the church is to become a pastor. NOT SO. God's people join together around Word and Sacrament, reaching out to a lost world. Dedicated, faithful workers assist and lead people in participating in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, building up the Body of Christ. The following vocations represent the many ways in which you can serve the Church in its vital ministries.

### PASTOR

As pastor, you will be considered both shepherd and servant of God's flock. Through you, on a daily basis, God will carry out His most wonderful work, that of saving the lost. As you care for the members a congregation, you will be active in preaching, teaching, administering the Sacraments, visiting members, comforting the sorrowing, giving godly counsel, and providing a vision of outreach. You may also serve as a military or institutional chaplain, a missionary, a church administrator, an educator, or a campus pastor.

### TEACHER

If you have a passion for working with students in a Christian setting, this is the vocation for you. You will help each student reach his/her potential while integrating faith into their learning. You will partner with pastors and parents in the joy of preparing students for a life of service to Church and world. Teachers serve in Lutheran preschool, elementary or secondary settings. You will also be able to utilize your gifts and talents in coaching, music, drama, art, or other educational arenas.

### DEACONESS

Deaconess means "servant." As a Christian woman in the role of deaconess, you will share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through acts of human care and mercy. This may include visiting the sick and homebound, teaching Bible studies, or working with individuals with special needs. Deaconesses serve in congregations, hospitals and other institutions, inner cities and foreign mission fields.

### **DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

These individuals coordinate with the pastor to focus on the vision and leadership of a congregation's various educational ministries. This can involve all ages, nourishing children, youth, adults, and family groups in Christian instruction and growth in personal faith through Bible classes, Sunday School, Midweek programs, Vacation Bible School, youth programs or outdoor ministry.

### **DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH**

As a Director of Christian Outreach, you are a valuable member of an outreach-oriented ministry team. Your primary function is to stimulate, educate, mobilize, and support parishioners in witnessing, evangelizing, and assimilating new members. You might also serve in a mission congregation or develop cross-cultural outreach in the United States or on a foreign mission field.

### **DIRECTOR OF FAMILY LIFE MINISTRY**

Families with a strong commitment to Christ and a life of service to others provide a positive influence in and throughout the world. As a Director of Family Life Ministry, you will support and equip healthy relationships in families. The Family Life graduate will be certified by the National Council on Family Relations and equipped to develop and implement programming in a congregation to strengthen healthy families. The Director of Family Life Ministry will serve as a partner on a congregation's ministry team.

### **DIRECTOR OF PARISH MUSIC**

Music is a delightful, noble gift of God, one of His gifts to His people. As a Director of Parish Music, you will use your talents and spiritual sensitivity to enhance the music life and worship experiences in a congregation. You will give leadership to choirs, instrumental ensembles, and soloists by playing an integral role in the life of the church and by enhancing your congregation's love for communal worship.

### **DIRECTOR OF CHURCH MINISTRIES**

Ministry is a team effort. The Director of Church Ministries works under a pastor's guidance and direction in a variety of ways. You might be involved in evangelism, visitation, Christian education, youth work, senior ministry, parish administration, assimilation and spiritual gifts administration and other ministries.

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The Concordia University System provides a path toward serving the church through its theology and religious vocation education programs. To learn more about majors and programs offered at Concordia University System campuses, visit [www.lcms.org/cuscampuses](http://www.lcms.org/cuscampuses) and look for “Majors and Programs.”

# God at Work

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by *Gene Edward Veith*

God healed me.

I wasn't feeling well, so I went to the doctor. The nurse ran some tests; the lab technicians identified the problem; the doctor wrote me a prescription; I had it filled by the pharmacist. In no time, I was a lot better. It was God who healed me, and He did it through the medical vocations.

God gave me my daily bread.

He did it through the farmer who grew the grain, the truck driver who hauled it, the bakers at the factory, the stockers at the grocery store, and the lady at the check-out counter. It was God who fed me—just as I prayed in the Lord's Prayer—and He did it through the vocations of ordinary people just doing their jobs.

God talked to me.

The pastor read God's Word. In the sermon, he drew out of the Bible God's Law, which cut me to the quick. Then he proclaimed the Gospel of how Christ has done everything for my salvation. When I confessed my sins, God, through His Word as delivered by the pastor, told me I was forgiven.

This is the doctrine of vocation. The term literally means "calling."

According to Luther, every Christian is called to particular offices and tasks, through which God Himself works to govern and care for His created order.

God teaches through teachers; He protects us through the vocations of police officers, firefighters, soldiers, and government officials; He brings beauty through artists; He proclaims His Word and administers His Sacraments through pastors.

God could have created each new batch of children from the dust, as He did Adam, said Luther. But instead, He chose to create new life by means of mothers and fathers. It is still God who creates and cares for little babies, but

He does so through the vocation of parenthood. When parents bring their children to Baptism, provide for their needs, discipline them, bring them up in His Word, and raise them to adulthood, God is at work every step of the way.

### **Lutheran Distinctives**

Medieval Catholicism taught that only priests, nuns, and those in other church-work professions have a vocation, a calling from God. The Reformation taught that *all Christians* have callings from God, including those who work in the so-called secular sphere.

Reformed Christians also believe in the doctrine of vocation, but their emphasis tends to be on “Law”: what the Christian should do as a distinctly Christian parent, businessperson, artist, or tradesman.

The Lutheran emphasis is characteristically on “Gospel”: what *God does* through our human callings.

Lutherans emphasize how God works through means: In His spiritual kingdom, He works through the Word and Sacraments as means of grace. In His earthly kingdom, He works through the natural order and through human vocations.

Just as we receive God’s manifold blessings through other people, God works through us to bless others. Though our relationship to God is based totally on His grace, to which we can add nothing of our own, our relationship to our neighbors does call for good works. The doctrine of vocation has to do with our duties to love and serve our neighbors.

Of course, in a fallen world, we also sin in our vocations. We do not use our vocations to the fullest to serve our neighbors, as God intends. We misuse our gifts, act outside our callings, and struggle to carry out our responsibilities. In Luther’s terms, we bear our cross in our vocations. The doctrine of vocation amounts to a comprehensive theology of the Christian life.

### **Vocation and the Catechism**

Luther identified four types of callings that every Christian has:

- As a member of the church

- As a member of a family
- As someone who works
- As a citizen of a community

The *Small Catechism* includes a “Table of Duties,” which consists of scriptural direction for the various vocations. (Technically, only a Christian—who has been “called” by the Gospel—has a “vocation.” Luther uses other terms—“office,” “estates,” “stations”—for positions held by non-Christians, through whom God also can work.)

As one reads the “Table of Duties,” it is evident that one person can hold a number of different vocations at once. A man might be both a husband and a father, a master (to his employees) and a servant (to his boss). He is subject to the governing authorities and, possibly, a leader in his church. In each case, God’s Word gives direction for how we should live out our callings.

The *Small Catechism* also addresses vocation in the section on “The Office of the Keys,” in the questions dealing with what sins we should confess. We are told to “Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker?” The Second Table of the Commandments—from “Honor your father and your mother” to the injunctions to respect your neighbor’s property and relationships—all have to do with vocation.

With the doctrine of vocation, everyday life is transfigured. We realize that the way to serve God is not by some extraordinary act of mystical devotion, but by serving our neighbors in the daily circumstances of life—in our families, our jobs, our church, and our involvement in the community.

With the doctrine of vocation, ordinary relationships, the 9-to-5 routine, taking care of the kids, the work-a-day world—the way we spend most hours of the day—become charged with the presence of God.

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NOTE: His book *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, expands on the main thrust of this article further.

More of Luther on Vocation:

-Every occupation has its own honor before God. Ordinary work is a divine vocation or calling. In our daily work no matter how important or mundane we serve God by serving the neighbor and we also participate in God's on-going providence for the human race.

-God Himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation it is.

-The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.

-God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.