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SPRING 2018

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Vocation for Life

Intersections is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-seven institutions that comprise the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). Each issue reflects on the **intersection** of faith, learning, and teaching within Lutheran higher education. It is published by the NECU, and has its home in the Presidential Center for Faith and Learning at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, the institutional sponsor of the publication. **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives.

About the Cover and Issue

A few years ago, I started noticing just how elaborately and creatively students were decorating the tops of the caps they wore on graduation day—lots of shout-outs to mom and dad, some heartfelt appreciation for the campus coffee shop, even some last minute, self-effacing appeals for employment. Because the 2017 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference theme was “Vocation for Life,” I asked recent graduates to submit photos of their caps as potential cover art for this, the accompanying issue of *Intersections*. There were dozens of entries, but the editorial board chose “The Journey Begins,” by Danya Tazyeen (class of 2016), to be featured here. Congratulations Danya!

The 2017 summer conference and lead articles in this issue deal with vocational reflection as a lifelong journey, with different vocations for different periods of life, and with how Lutheran colleges and universities can educate students for the many callings that they will need to hear and heed. Also included is two authors who think about vocation throughout the lifespan from different religious perspectives. A review of Mark Tranvik’s *Martin Luther and the Called Life*, as well as two essays “outside the theme” round out the issue. I hope you find the issue challenging and informative. As always, please contact me to discuss ways that you might contribute to this conversation within *Intersections*.

JASON MAHN, Editor

Intersections

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From the Publisher



Lynn Hunnicutt's guest editorial of this issue reminds us that the concept of vocation points students toward a life that finds room to love and serve others. I celebrate that the schools of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU) have reaffirmed and enhanced efforts

to educate for these core educational outcomes that have long been part of Lutheran higher education. Across our network, curricular and co-curricular educational programs encourage students to embrace a concern for the needs and interests of others as well as themselves.

Even so, the culture of Lutheran higher education that established and sustained these educational values and outcomes is at risk. Even though the day is long past when a Lutheran educational culture could be sustained informally by a larger ecclesiastical and ethnic Lutheran culture present on our campuses, NECU schools still depend largely on individuals or cadres of individuals who informally assemble to sustain a culture of Lutheran higher education at each school. Although there is a wide recognition that it is time to institute formal, institutional practices to sustain a valued educational culture, only fledgling and partial steps have been taken. There are some bright spots. For example, a few schools have created solid programs of orientation for new faculty and staff. But, for the most part, although many at NECU schools recognize the value of the Lutheran intellectual

and educational tradition for twenty-first-century higher education, most remain uncertain about how to best articulate that value. Most are hesitant to develop institutionalized practices to maintain a culture that publicly identifies our cherished educational values and student outcomes with Lutheran higher education.

As a first important step toward addressing and repairing this situation, NECU's Board of Directors endorsed a statement on the common calling of its schools. The statement, *Rooted and Open*, affirms that the Lutheran identity of a NECU school is an *institutional* identity, not dependent upon the *individual* religious identities of faculty, administrators, and students of the school. It further affirms that NECU schools share a common calling to implement the educational values and outcomes that are vitally important over the whole course of a student's life.

Best tactics for reclaiming, transmitting, and reinterpreting the 500-year-old Lutheran intellectual and educational tradition are yet to be developed. But it is a culture worth sustaining. It is worth sustaining because it is our best bulwark against forces that would transform NECU schools into mere transmitters of knowledge instead of "transmitters" of education for vocation, for purpose, and for making a contribution to the common good. When an educational culture has frayed, it could be replaced with another that affirms such values, but it is much easier to reclaim, reinterpret, and reinvigorate the received, albeit frayed, culture. Establishing tactics for just that work still face us.

Mark Wilhelm is the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.

Guest Editorial LYNN HUNNICUTT

If you look up the etymology of the word *vocation*, you see that it comes from Latin, via old French (*vocaciun*) and Middle English (*vocacioun*). The word stems from the root *vox* (voice), and is related to the Latin term *vocare* (to call).

One way to get at the definition of *vocation* is to consider cognates, or words that share the same root. These include: *evoke*, *provoke*, *revoke*, *invoke*, *advocate*, *convocation*, *vocal*, *equivocate*, and *vocabulary*. One might pause here and consider the relationship between one or two of these cognates and the sense of vocation as a call. Do they incorporate a notion of two parties—a sender and receiver? Do they include a sense of direction—of being for, to, or about something beyond both sender and receiver? Are they words that we might use in our work with students?

“Vocation’s cognates all presume a relationship of some sort. Convocation is a calling. Provocation is a work meant to incite action in another. To revoke signals the end of an agreement or understanding.”

Vocation’s cognates all presume a relationship of some sort. Convocation is a calling. Provocation is a work meant to incite action in another. To revoke signals the end of an agreement or understanding. Kathleen Cahalan defines vocation using prepositions, and notes that “prepositions express relationship. When we frame vocation through prepositions, callings become more relational, dynamic and multiple” (xi). Vocation also includes this notion. It presumes

relationship in which one party (the caller) invites a response from another (the called).

Martin Luther’s understanding of vocation implies that all Christians are called to love and serve God by serving the neighbor, and that this is accomplished through specific callings to a particular station in life. Thus, vocation presumes a relationship between God and God’s people. According to Luther, these general and particular callings or vocations are what we are created for, and they give direction to the lives we live here on earth. Similarly, Calvin differentiates between a general call available to all people and a special call generally made available only to believers.

This leaves one to wonder how those who do not claim the Christian tradition might understand vocation. Does God call a Muslim or a Jew in the same way God calls a Christian? What about a Buddhist who does not share the monotheistic tradition of Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Or what about an atheist who does not believe in a higher power? Can we say that these people also possess vocations? If so, what might those callings look like?

These are difficult questions. Here is one possible resolution. Vocation presumes a relationship between the caller and the one receiving the call. Yet the nature of both caller and receiver may (and perhaps should) be broadly interpreted. So, for example, my friend may believe that she is called by nature to work for the preservation of the earth. Another friend might believe that he is called by his



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community to strengthen the bonds between neighbors. I happen to believe that I am called by God to, among other things, raise my two children. Interestingly, Luther even seems to imply that we are called by our tools—the ordinary equipment with which we work every day:

If you are a craftsman you will find the Bible placed in your workshop, in your hands, in your heart...Only look at your tools, your needle, your thimble, your beer barrel, your articles of trade, your scales, your measures, and you will find...they say this to your face, 'My dear, use me toward your neighbor as you would want him to act toward you with that which is his. (as quoted in Wingren 72)

Returning to our list of cognates, we see that they are grounded in the everyday, ordinary things of life. Often, these cognates describe relationships mediated through words. It's no surprise that discerning vocation generally requires language, phrases, and sentences. How else would we be

"Vocations often consist of a specific summons to a possibly ordinary (dare I say humble) life."

made aware of what we might be and do with our lives? And yet, we sometimes (perhaps unwittingly) conflate vocation with this grand and vague sense of ourselves and what we are meant to become. By its grounding in everyday words—the same grounding that these cognates possess—we see that vocation is most definitely not vague and need not be grand. Rather, vocations often consist of a specific summons to a possibly ordinary (dare I say humble) life. It is this sacredness in the ordinary that Luther emphasized when he wrote in "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation":

A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community. (130)

One has to take care in claiming that vocation is grounded in words. I do not mean to claim that we lack a vocation until we hear specific words from an ultimate or supernatural source of our calling. Often the words through which we discover our vocations come to us in a distinctly ordinary way. Sometimes our calling comes in an invitation we receive over the phone. Or a friend points out something we are good at that we hadn't known about ourselves; a professor suggests to a student that she should consider a particular course, or major, or study away opportunity; an acquaintance invites us to join a group and we discover that this is exactly where we belong. Vocation is not merely a vague sense or a spiritual intuition. Our vocations sometimes come to us through simple words uttered in ordinary conversation. Indeed, the person who utters such a call sometimes has no idea that their words have such profound impact.

The careful reader will note that I have referred to both vocation and vocations. This is not an editorial error. We can think of vocation as permanent (singular) yet changing (plural)—a general thing we are called to throughout our lives, and the particular things we are called to for a time. From both Luther and Calvin, we have this bifurcation of vocation—a general calling to lifelong obedience to God combined with particular and possibly temporary callings to each individual. While aspects of our vocation do not change, the numerous ways we live out these facets of our calling may.

Regardless of how you define it, then, vocation changes over time. When we are young, we are called to study and learn. As we graduate from high school or college, we enter the world of paid employment, hopefully in a job that suits our skills and abilities and serves the community around us in some way. For some (many, we hope), this job reflects an aspect of one's vocation. As we approach retirement, we are called to refocus our energy away from paid employment and toward other forms of service to the community. Some will be called to care for parents or spouses through illness and death. When we recognize that discerning vocation does not depend on a once-for-all discovery, we are relieved of the pressure to help our students find their vocation (singular) while they are on campus and freed to equip them to discern for themselves their vocations (plural)—the ways in which they are being called to service in the world.

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The Lutheran heritage of our institutions, which makes our schools both rooted and inclusive, gives us the means by which we might foster the lifelong discernment of vocation. Our rootedness gives us a foundation from which students (and others) can learn about vocation and how it is discerned throughout life. Our inclusiveness

makes our campuses welcoming of all into this discernment—whether they are students just beginning to discern, or post-retirement alumni thinking about how to give back. This heritage can make our schools a place where we practice our own vocational discernment and move out into the world bringing the gift of calling to those we encounter—our colleagues, our alumni and our friends.

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KATHERINE TURPIN

One Life, Many Callings: Vocation Across the Lifespan



In Lutheran and other colleges and universities, discerning vocation has been a task associated primarily with older adolescents and younger adults. Because these populations are preparing to enter the work force full time and are making major decisions about how they will spend their

energy and engage in the world, the practice of discerning vocation is particularly vibrant at this stage of life, and perhaps deserves special attention in institutions with traditional college-aged students. However, universities and colleges are intergenerational communities with staff, administrators, faculty, students, alumni, and donors spanning all ages of adulthood each with their own experiences of ongoing vocational discernment and needs for vocational support.

Some years ago now, I entered a three-year collaborative research venture hosted by the Ecumenical Institute at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. A group of interdisciplinary scholars gathered to explore how vocation is experienced differently across the ages and stages of the human lifespan. Together we wrote a book out of our research, *Calling All Years Good: Christian*

Vocation Throughout Life's Seasons (eds. Cahalan and Miller-McLemore), which I would recommend for a fuller treatment of these issues.¹ We read existing social science and practical theological literature on vocation and lifespan theory, reflected together on our experiences of calling at various points in the lifespan, and interviewed persons at stages in life that we had not yet experienced. Through our conversations, we began to identify other points during the lifespan when vocational discernment becomes particularly vibrant.

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In this essay I will explore some things that change about vocation when one considers its life cycle beyond the era of young adulthood. While our research considered

Katherine Turpin is associate professor of religious education at the Iliff School of Theology. She was a recent collaborator on the book project *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons*, edited by Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Eerdmans 2017). A mother to three school-aged children, she splits her time between Denver and the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming, where her husband directs a retreat center.

vocation from infancy to elders, because this journal is focused primarily on higher education, I will begin with adolescence and work through older adulthood noting major features of vocation for many people during that phase, indicating vocational needs that are present, and naming the markers of transition to another phase.

Rarely do people experience one steady calling expressed in one context across their lifetime, except for the most general sense of Christian vocation. Rather, a sense of vocation is particular, changes over time, and is bound within the contexts and relationships and body that is available at that moment. This means that expression of vocation, even the callings that we are able to hear, are shaped by things like economic situations, cultural narratives about what is possible for us, our embodied capacities, our sense of the expansiveness of the timeline in which we can respond, and the duties and obligations of our social roles and responsibilities. As theologian Miguel Diaz notes, "The songs that God sings are not universal songs capable of being heard by a universally conceived hearer. Rather, the songs contain the specific lyrics, rhythms, and melodies associated with concrete human subjects" (Diaz 24).

This recognition of the particularity and limits of human life causes us to reimagine our theological understanding of vocation in important ways. For those whose stories are interpreted within the Christian tradition, biblical call stories may have a particular weight in how we understand the call of God upon our lives. We have many dramatic call stories in the biblical tradition, such as Moses hearing the voice of God from a burning bush sending him to Pharaoh, or the disciples being called to leave their nets and become, instead, fishers of people. These stories have a compelling and definitive narrative force, a certainty about the call from God and the needed response that most people do not experience in their lifetime.

When researchers on our team talked to lay persons in communities of faith, most could not identify one particular, pivotal experience of calling. Many lay persons suspect that a dramatic call from God is something only experienced by those who enter fulltime ministry or a religious order. Psychologist Matt Bloom, a researcher on this project, finds that for most people any sense of calling or experience of vocation was only evident through what he calls "retrospective sense-making" (Cahalan and Miller-McLemore 3). In

other words, as people told the stories of their lives, they were able sometimes in retrospect to describe how they saw the Spirit of God leading and moving in the decisions and commitments that they had made, but did not always sense it as it was happening. Many people desire to have a grounded sense of how their lives might be an expression of response to God's purposes in the world as they move forward in time. But to do so, they must often leave behind the hopes for dramatic certainty in what they are meant to do with their lives, and reframe vocation as an experience of ongoing discernment of the calling of God and responsiveness within the particular contexts and relationships of their lives. What this process looks like varies based at different points in the life span.

Adolescence

Adolescence is marked with the emergence of a dramatically new adult body, which comes with attending social expectations for increased maturity. Less visible to the naked eye, but equally as important, adolescent brain development allows for an increased awareness of their performance of self within a social audience and an improved capacity for taking the self as an object of reflection. These biological transformations lead to important vocational developments. Where once the situatedness of one's self within the circles of school and family was experienced as a given, adolescents begin experimenting with possible selves based on the important narratives of being

"Adolescents begin experimenting with possible selves based on the important narratives of being and value offered to them by their environment."

and value offered to them by their environment. They begin to develop a sense that who they are matters and can be malleable based on their decisions and commitments. This experimentation can be a form of vocational discernment, as young people try on social groups, commitments, and styles of being to see what fits.

During the brain restructuring that happens in puberty, a fair amount of emotional processing shifts temporarily to the amygdala. Because frontal-lobe functioning is transitioning, primal fight or flight emotional responses are more dominant in everyday interactions creating what we commonly call “drama” in adolescent social life (Strauch 206). Depending on the amygdala, the same process also creates a capacity for awe, wonder, and emotional sensitivity unique to this stage of life. Youthful brains are more emotionally capable of deep encounters with love, beauty, and suffering that are central to spiritual experience. This emotional receptivity means that many narratives of awakening to a sense of particular vocation begin during adolescence. Encounters with something awe-inspiring, whether deeply beautiful or terrible, can change the way an adolescent sees the world and their particular role in it.

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As this project’s authors and collaborators gathered and talked about our experiences of calling in our adolescent years, we recognized the ways in which experiences of suffering and grief also shaped our callings over a lifetime. Often we think of vocational clarity as a joyful response to inspirational moments, but it can also be a compassionate or determined response to darkness and sorrow. For some adolescents, experiences of personal illness or disability, experiences of war or cultural conflict, or experiences of hunger and poverty inform their commitments to participation in healing and justice work. Learning difficulties or cultural dismissal in school may lead to commitments to be better teachers to the next generation. Suffering during adolescence may forge a sense of the needs of the world; a passion to end the conditions that led to such suffering may be the cornerstone of a calling across the lifespan.

Attentiveness to these experiences of grief and loss may be an important vocational discernment practice for older adolescents as they start into college.

Often young people jump into the fray of curating a resume for college applications before they have a chance to ask what is really valuable in the world and what they have to contribute to it. They need trusted adults to recognize, validate, and encourage them in the form of “interactive mirrors” rather than “didactic evaluators,” sharing their own experiences not as exemplars, but as “empathic possibilities designed to connect with them” (Nakkula and Toshalis 34). Adults who resist offering quick interpretation or answers, but instead listen carefully over time as an informal practice of spiritual direction, offer critical space for conversation, reflection, and connection.

This increasing capacity for an interior life and new recognition of others’ corresponding interiority makes young people especially interested in hearing about the vocational experiences of other people, particularly heroic narratives against which young people test the validity of their own perceptions, either by contrast or by confirmation. Educational theorist Kieran Egan describes the way that adolescents seem particularly primed to respond to the heroic stories of transcendence and resistance in everyday persons (Egan 71). They are particularly responsive to persons who respond to callings in ways that are extraordinary, courageous, and ideologically consistent. In later young adulthood, people turn to vocational exemplars who tend to be more realistic, everyday persons in a young adult’s social circle who model vocational possibilities for them (Bloom et al. 24).

As adolescents draw nearer to the end of adolescence, for some corresponding to their early years in college, they begin to take on responsibility for meeting their own survival needs, and begin to meet increased social demands to perform adulthood. Often this transition is marked by moving out of restrictive environments controlled by others into settings in which they are decision-makers and contributors. A key marker of this transition is a dawning vocational recognition that the self is not infinitely malleable, but expresses a particular instance of creation with human limitations and capabilities generated by the accumulation of life experiences.

Younger Adulthood

As adolescence winds to a close, the people who matter to emerging adults begin to expect them to make decisions and take steps that firm up the shape of their adult identity and livelihood. Things become serious in terms of performing adult identity, and young people step directly into life's deepest vocational questions. For older adults looking back across the lifespan in retrospect, younger adulthood is often the period of time most closely associated with vocational decision-making. However, from within the lived experience of this phase of life, vocational discernment can feel elusive, experimental, and even chaotic to the emerging adults who wrestle with it.

"From within the lived experience of this phase of life, vocational discernment can feel elusive, experimental, and even chaotic to the emerging adults who wrestle with it."

With the phase of younger adulthood, we begin to see that the length of time spent in each period of life can vary greatly based on the life experiences, bodily limitations, and social and economic opportunities available to each person. For some, younger adulthood can extend for more than a decade, filled with vocational experimentation and an extended process of growing into various roles and callings. For others, a series of early commitments to long-term relationships, forced economic independence, childrearing, or pre-scripted professional tracks can shorten what we are calling younger adulthood and thrust people into the vocational experiences of middle adulthood much sooner.

Economic and social changes have meant that more young adults are struggling to meet the classic sociological markers of adulthood in their twenties and thirties, such as becoming economically independent, making commitment to socially permanent relationships, or establishing their own household (Wuthnow 28). Research from the Pew Center indicates that more intergenerational households exist in the United States now than

have existed since 1981, with many young adults moving back into their parents' or other relatives' homes while working for economic independence, or living with a series of roommates while chasing steady employment. These structural changes mean that adulthood can seem like an elusive identity marker that may or may not be viably achieved and maintained. The inability to demonstrate competency and full social recognition as an adult can cause spiritual anxiety about one's fundamental worth, a significant vocational problem in this time of life.

As young adults begin to compose a life through choices about where to live, with whom to relate, and where to give their energies, one vocational characteristic common to many younger adults is the temporary nature or impermanence of their life choices. An extended period of impermanence can have an impact on a younger adult's sense that they are in the process of responding to God's callings upon their life, which leaves them with the sense of multiple, chaotic, and transitory experiences that are not building to anything in particular. Sometimes what is characterized as flakiness or lack of commitment by parents or grandparents, or a failure to successfully discern and live into a calling by the young adult, can be a rational response to economic challenges that delay establishing a household and securing permanent employment.

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Many young adults watch middle-aged adults closely, seeking exemplars of vocational integration, people who have been able to live into multiple callings in their lives. Social psychologist Matt Bloom discusses the importance of exemplars in the early discernment stages of those called into the professions, but exemplars are needed for all who navigate multiple callings to love and to work: "Exemplars were important because they were real, salient models of individuals who appear to be living their

own calling in and through their work. Informants used exemplars to gauge whether their own true self elements might fit a particular professional role—an identity work task we called mapping” (Bloom et al. 24). For example, as a young adult doctoral student, I was actively seeking successful female academics who also managed to have a satisfactory relational and home life. This was a rare combination some decades ago, and finding exemplars who were blending these vocational callings was very important to me as I completed my doctorate.

In the midst of all of these transitions, some vocational discernment may occur through intentional, introspective practice, through conversation with trusted family members and friends, or through mentors in professional settings. Much of it occurs through trial and error. With exposure to exemplars and the introspective space to imagine oneself into a variety of roles, vocational discernment can occur through a reflective process in which they compare realistic self-knowledge against vocational possibilities with wise guidance from elders (Bloom et al. 27). In the absence of these guided, reflective opportunities, many younger adults engage vocational discernment through an embodied process of trial and error.

“Finding places of employment that aren’t mere exploitation of their energies, but rather communities that provide opportunities to take on significant roles and responsibilities can be a difficult quest for younger adults.”

Employers, long-term volunteer opportunities, and faith communities can meet young adults and help them with exploratory modes of vocational discernment when they offer worthy work in this experimental phase. Work that gives younger adults a chance for taking risks, for being in charge of decisions that matter, and for making a contribution to something bigger than themselves is essential to the process of discernment of vocation. However, offering a place to test the emerging strengths of younger adults is complicated for workplaces and other institutions who

long for the energy and passion of young adulthood, but also desire loyalty and stability of presence that can be unrealistic given the sociological and economic factors that make young adults the most mobile stage of life. Finding places of employment that aren’t mere exploitation of their energies, but rather communities that provide opportunities to take on significant roles and responsibilities can be a difficult quest for younger adults.

As young adults begin taking on the care not only of themselves but increasingly of community, institutions, and family through work and care for others, they begin to transition into middle adulthood. The probing commitments begin to solidify as young adults make multiple enduring commitments, such as investment in long-term employment or education or giving birth to children that are affirmed by others and difficult to reverse.

Middle Adulthood

One of the markers of middle adulthood is that it is a stage of heightened responsibility. Positively, middle adults move into the stage of life where they have the potential to shape and to carry the life of institutions, to create households and raise the next generation while often simultaneously caring for aging parents, to positively impact the well-being of others through responsive vocational expression. So many faithful callings can converge at this one moment in the life span. The struggle of this era for many people is an experience of multiple competing vocations, such as a work life and a family life, that can make contending demands on the person and have conflicting standards of success.

Middle adults seek vocational satisfaction through integration between the day-to-day details of living, expression of their core commitments through the way they spend their time, and a sense that their work and caregiving requires their unique capabilities. Is life just “one damn thing after another,” or are they contributing their gifts and time to things that really matter to them? Is there alignment in the give and take of the day-to-day? They need opportunities for vocational discernment between “positive” and “negative” self-sacrifice in the giving of themselves to something larger than themselves, help with naming whether their vocational experiences of work and caregiving are life-giving or life-depleting. The

space and time to wrestle with the difficulties of competing vocational demands are hard to come by because of the number of responsibilities that many middle adults carry.

College campuses have many middle adults working as staff, faculty, and administrators, as well as students who have returned to higher education at this stage in their life as part of vocational discernment. Middle adults can experience competition between their calls to integrate their unique capacities and values in their work life, to provide loving care for younger and older generations in

“Another common vocational experience of middle adulthood is the grief of juggling so many important callings that one feels unable to be fully faithful to any of them.”

their families, and to build and sustain relationships of mutual value with friends and partners. Conversations with exemplars and wise guides who are a little further down the path of life experience can be helpful in this time period, as it can be difficult for middle adults to get their heads above the fray of this active and fruitful period in life, to have a sense of perspective on all of the vocational response that may be happening.

Two difficult vocational moments that perhaps indicate the range of vocational expression in this age are the “is this all there is?” moments and the “letting all the balls drop” moments. The question of “is this all there is?” may come from successful navigation of the requirements of a career or building a family, only to find that the place where one has arrived does not seem to be integrating one’s unique passions and skills with something larger than oneself that has significance. We heard stories of major career and life structure shifts in middle adulthood in response to experiences of vocational dissatisfaction. These upheavals on the vocational journey come about when one has finally moved into fully authorized adult social roles, only to find that these roles and activities do not express alignment with one’s deepest sense of calling.

Another common vocational experience of middle adulthood is the grief of juggling so many important

callings that one feels unable to be fully faithful to any of them. Whether one’s desire to invest in emotionally satisfactory relationships is thwarted by one’s desire to excel in the workplace, or whether the demands of caregiving make giving one’s full attention to building and sustaining meaningful work, the competing demands of middle adulthood can cause vocational angst.

Whether middle adults are struggling with a life that does not seem to be responsive to calling, or whether they struggle with the conflicts and demands of many callings, social support for integrating love and work is essential as part of vocational discernment in middle adulthood. As Matt Bloom notes, “What they do not need are people who ‘had it all,’ but rather people who led real, complex lives and who navigated and negotiated, and succeeded and failed their way through the joys and sorrows of middle adulthood” (Cahalan and Miller-McLemore 141). Spaces to express experiences of frustration and struggle with living into the competing responsibilities of middle adulthood, to be vulnerable about the lack of satisfaction and integration one is experiencing, and to not have to express competency and control over all areas of life are welcome spaces for ongoing vocational discernment.

Over time, middle adults gain an increasing awareness of their own mortality, whether through bodily changes or through members of one’s own generation who are experiencing chronic or even fatal illness. The death of the older generations in one’s family, the nest that empties as young adult children make their way into the world, or the loss of a life-partner through divorce or death can all raise vocational questions about how one will spend the rest of one’s active adult life.

Late Adulthood

One of the surprises in our research of vocation across the lifespan was how many different vocational moments arise throughout the period of life we sometimes treat as one lump “working adult” stage. While research team member Jack Fortin had convinced us through his work that retirement was often a point of vocational crisis and increased need for discernment about what faithful responsiveness to calling in our life looks like beyond paid employment, we also began to recognize multiple significant moments

of vocational discernment and clarity that are important to honor throughout the middle and late years of adulthood.

While in many ways, the period we named late adulthood is simply an extension of the competing demands of active middle adulthood, there is an important “turning” that happens as the years pass by (Cahalan and Miller-McLemore 150). One important point that we named seemed to come as working people recognize they only have a limited period of paid work left. The sense arises that there will be an end to the time of productivity and active responsibility, and a rising vocational clarity emerges in response to the sense of limitation in time. Whereas younger adults have a sense of a long life span stretching out before them, late adulthood is marked by a sense of a shortened timeline and the need to give prudently of one’s remaining energies and capacities.

At this moment of late adulthood, many experience an intensified sense of the importance of spending their time wisely, and not just allowing oneself to be tossed about by the demands of the institutions and systems in which one participates. Among late adults, one sees a clearer sense of motivation and intentions in their work and relational expressions, and a desire not to waste time on activities and situations that are not integrative of one’s gifts and the higher purposes to which one aspires. We can see this in faculty members not willing to engage in one more round of committee work in an area that does not align with their

“The vocational clarity that can emerge in this last phase of active adulthood can be a gift to other generations of wisdom, of self-honesty, of the recognitions of human limitation and creativity that we all would do well to keep in mind.”

commitments, or administrators letting go of high-demand programs that do not reflect their deepest visions for their work to focus on nurturing smaller programs more aligned with their commitments. While this increased vocational clarity can come across as entitlement, such as “I did my time on the personnel committee, and now it

is not my problem,” it could be fruitful for institutions and colleagues to recognize this as an essential moment of vocational discernment that contributes to the generativity of persons in late adulthood (Fowler 99-102).

While late adulthood is often marked by a shift in the amount or location of vocationally-expressive work, the importance of meaningful expression remains. Older adults feel the need to be the wise guide to younger generations, while handing some of the heavy lifting over to middle and younger adults. While this is an important moment to make a difference in the younger generation as grandparent or mentor, it is also a time where late adults are making sense of losses, coming to terms with their own limitations and failures, and reconciling themselves with self, others, God, and their own sense of mortality (Cahalan and McLemore 159-61). The vocational clarity that can emerge in this last phase of active adulthood can be a gift to other generations of wisdom, of self-honesty, of the recognitions of human limitation and creativity that we all would do well to keep in mind.

Older Adulthood

Late adulthood can last well into retirement for those who do not experience major changes in health. For others, chronic illness or life-altering injury can thrust them into the stage of older adulthood much earlier. At some point, the increasing need for accommodation in order to move about in the world begins to make its mark on the activity of older adults. Many find themselves ending previously vocationally meaningful and pleasurable activities because of bodily limitations, such as volunteering, hiking, travel, quilting, or caring for grandchildren. They find themselves experiencing an increasing dependence on others to take care of their basic needs because of significant limitations on mobility, and the slowing down that comes with aging bodies (Cahalan and Miller-McLemore 182).

For some, this time of becoming care-receivers instead of caregivers can be a moment of vocational crisis. When we interviewed many friends and colleagues in their eighties and nineties, we found that none were afraid of dying, but many feared the stage of becoming dependent on others for care. The activities and roles that

“The stage of older adulthood challenges an easy collapse of human vocation into productivity within the human community.”

give us a sense of contribution to the communities in which we take part can cause deep grief when they are no longer possible for us.

The stage of older adulthood challenges an easy collapse of human vocation into productivity within the human community. As time becomes existentially short, and death a close companion amongst friends of one's own generation, vocational needs shift. While humans continue to seek ways to express core values/beliefs in meaningful ways, even if in modified form, other vocational tasks rise to the fore. For some, there is a lightening of attachment to physical objects, persons, and spaces, sometimes labeled “gerotranscendence” (Tornstam 55). Attention to the potential grief, loneliness, and isolation of this stage of life requires commitment from the community to maintain connection with older adults once mobility becomes limited. Older adults require people willing to slow down and be present to their new realities, and opportunities to seek reconciliation, to name gratitude, and to say goodbye.

Conclusion

When I presented this research at the Vocation of a Lutheran College conference last summer, I had a full professor come up to me after my talk to say: “I've been coming to these conferences about vocation for years, and that is the first time anybody ever talked about vocation in a way that was relevant to me.” Our focus on vocational discernment as a one-time event related to entry of the work force in young adulthood limits the capacity of people at other moments of the lifespan to wrestle with and seek alignment with their deepest sense of vocation.

By attending to the interaction of embodiment, cultural context, sense of time, and relationships that impact the discernment and expression of vocation throughout a lifetime, other central struggles and watershed moments in the life of vocation come to the fore.

Endnotes

1. In this highly collaborative research project, I was responsible for writing the chapters on adolescence and young adulthood. In this article, I am drawing heavily on the insights of colleagues (Kathleen Cahalan, Jane Patterson, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Matt Bloom, Joyce Ann Mercer, John Neafsey, Jack Fortin, and Laura Fanucci) who wrote about the other phases of life whose more nuanced work can be found in the book.

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Vocation for Emerging Adulthood: Within and Beyond College



At the end of the first season of the hit Netflix comedy series, *Master of None*, the two young adult main characters' relationship is on thin ice. Dev (played by Aziz Ansari) and Rachel (played by Noël Wells) have been dating for several months, and the initial joy of dating has begun to dwindle.

They are getting on each other's nerves. Their sex life has become blasé. Rachel is angry Dev failed to tell his parents they were even dating.

In the season finale, Dev and Rachel attend a friend's wedding. During the reading of the vows, which are over-the-top in their lovey effusiveness, Dev and Rachel are transported into an alternate reality in which they imagine what their vows might look like:

Dev: "Rachel, I'm... not 100 percent sure about this. Are you the one person I'm supposed to be with forever? I don't know. And what's the other option? We break up? ...I don't know I guess...gettin' married is just the safer bet at this point. [Pause as Dev stares off into the distance.] Sorry, I was just thinking about all the paths my life could have taken."

Rachel: "Dev, you're a great guy. You really are. But you're right...are we supposed to be together forever? I don't know. And it just sucks because I mean it feels like everything is laid out now. There are no more surprises. We get married, have kids, get old, and then we die. And I've basically invested two of my prime years with you so I should just go all in. That's just math. So, let's do this. Quickly."

Minister: "Do you, Dev, take Rachel to be your partner in a possibly outdated institution in order to have a quote-unquote normal life? Are you ready to give up an idealistic search for a soulmate and try to make it work with Rachel so you can move forward with your life?"

Dev (grimacing): "I do."

Minister: "And do you, Rachel, promise to make a crazy eternal bond with this gentleman who you happen to be dating at this stage in your life where people normally get married?"

Rachel (nonchalantly): "Yep. I do."

Minister: "I now pronounce you two people who might realize they've made an...unfortunate mistake in about three years."

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After the wedding, Dev confesses to being “freaked out” by their friends’ marriage vows. Sitting across from Rachel at their kitchen table, Dev admits, “I feel like when you’re younger and in your twenties your life is not as clear. You don’t know where it’s going. It takes turns you don’t expect. There’s surprises. And then as you get older it becomes a little clearer and you just know where you’re going to go. There’s less surprise and less excitement and you see what’s ahead. I’m just saying that whatever you’re doing at this age, it’s intense. Whatever you’re doing, whoever you’re with, that’s maybe it, you know? And it’s a lot of pressure.”

Master of None brilliantly tackles the realities of life for American young adults today with humor, authentic language, and an appreciation of the tension many twentysomethings feel between longing to “settle down,” and avoiding just “settling.”

While some seek to blame young adults for their “extended adolescence,” others appreciate their bind. *New York Times* columnist David Brooks devoted a 2017 column to the topic. Brooks tells the story of how one of his former students was forced to think differently after graduating from college. In college, this student succeeded by taking on small tasks, step by step. Assignments built up into course credits which eventually resulted in a college

“Twentysomethings are delaying leaving their parents’ homes, delaying marriage and having children, delaying home ownership, delaying financial independence, and—not usually on such lists, but certainly true—delaying (or avoiding) membership in churches or other faith communities.”

degree. But young adulthood, Brooks argues, is quite different. “This gets at one of the oddest phenomena in modern life,” Brooks explains. “Childhood is more structured than it has even been. But the great engine of the meritocracy spits people out into a young adulthood that is less structured than it has ever been” (Brooks).

Brooks is certainly right that young adulthood has changed significantly over the past twenty years or so. Compared to previous generations, twentysomethings are delaying leaving their parents’ homes, delaying marriage and having children, delaying home ownership, delaying financial independence, and—not usually on such lists, but certainly true—delaying (or avoiding) membership in churches or other faith communities.

Brooks eventually draws from author Meg Jay, explaining, “I used to think that the answer to the traumas of the twenties was patience. Life is long. Wait until they’re 30. They’ll figure it out. Now I think that laissez-faire attitude trivializes the experiences of young adulthood and condescends to the people going through them” (Brooks).

And then, as if anticipating this very topic, David Brooks ends with a call to action for colleges and universities. Given the uncertainty around us, Brooks essentially poses a set of vocational questions that students should take up in college, supported by savvy faculty and administrators:

What does it mean to be an adult today? What are seven or 10 ways people have found purpose in life? How big should I dream or how realistic should I be? ...What do I want and what is truly worth wanting? (Brooks)

While I might quibble with some of Brooks’ inferences, I appreciate his tone. It avoids the valence of blame that poisons so much writing and conversation by older adults about twentysomethings. The factors that have brought about such shifts in twentysomethings’ behavior are many, and if anyone or anything is “to blame” it is broader social and economic realities that have brought such shifts. Consider, for a start, student debt rates, changes in the housing market, availability of birth control, proliferation of unpaid internships, or shifts in entry-level salaries. It is too easy to complain that things are different than they used to be, and in the process blame college students for the behavior of their helicopter parents, or for accepting the \$50,000+ loan packages that adults offered them.

In the rest of this essay, I raise up the experiences and stories of young adults as they wrestle with questions of vocation that twentysomethings face today. Along the way, I draw from various conversation partners including theologians, cultural critics, psychologists, and young

adults themselves. My hope is that readers will develop empathy for the experiences of twentysomethings today. Through their stories and literature on vocation literature, we find several shifts in practices for colleges and universities to consider.

Emerging Adulthood

When I taught at Concordia College, an article appeared in the campus newspaper profiling two students in their early twenties who were in love. That wouldn't be so unusual, except that these students became engaged in college, and then married the summer before their senior year. In my informal conversations with students after the article came out, many expressed shock at how *weird* it would be to be married while still in college. Fair enough, I thought, until the article came up in a conversation with a senior colleague. He recalled that, back when he was a student, marriage before graduation was quite common. In fact, I believe he even described a residence hall assigned for married couples. That a college would have enough married students to develop a policy had never crossed my mind. But, then again, I was only ten years older than my students and shared a fair number of cultural connections with them.

"Not surprisingly, the emotional lives of twentysomethings are quite complex."

To describe what many scholars now call "emerging adulthood" requires a bit of historical context. In the recent past, traditional life events that have characterized young adulthood included marriage, starting a family, and full-time employment. However, scholars have now largely accepted that these life passages no longer best define what it means to be a young adult. Consider, for instance, that in the past few decades the average marriage age has shifted for women from 22 to around 27, and to 29 for men ("For Single Women"). And once young adults do get married, the options for exploration are endless—whether to have kids; whether to rent, buy, or share a

home; whether to stay in a soul-sucking job or pursue a poorly-paying dream; whether to pay off student loans or merely enjoy avocado toast.¹

How are young adults approaching these shifts? Aaron David Fuller argues that, for many twentysomethings:

Marriage and having children are delayed because it closes off opportunity and exploration in other spheres, such as work or romantic relationships... This is not to say that young adults don't honor commitment in any form or never adopt distinct beliefs or values. Young adults think deeply about such things, but look to many different spheres of experiences and life to form them because of their preference for independence and unbounded personal choice and exploration. (8)

Not surprisingly, the emotional lives of twentysomethings are quite complex. In her fine book, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter—And How to Make the Most of Them Now*, clinical psychologist and professor Meg Jay reports on the emotional struggles many twentysomethings reveal to her:

- "I feel like I'm in the middle of the ocean. Like I could swim in any direction but I can't see land on any side so I don't know which way to go."
- "I feel like I just have to keep hooking up and see what sticks."
- "I didn't know I'd be crying in the bathroom at work every day."
- "The twentysomething years are a whole new way of thinking about time. There's this big chunk of time and a whole bunch of stuff needs to happen somehow."
- "My sister is thirty-five and single. I'm terrified that's going to happen to me."
- "I can't wait to be liberated from my twenties."
- "Last night I prayed for just one thing in my life to be certain." (Jay xxiv–xxv)

Twentysomething life can be a trial; the choices, limits, and possibilities of contemporary life, a struggle.

Stories from the Front Lines

I now move from describing the situation more generally, to sharing three stories of twentysomethings specifically.

“The Abandonment Temptation”

In my book, *Kissing in the Chapel, Praying in the Frat House*, twentysomethings reflect on their experiences with faith and college. I recently reached out to one of the essayists, Johnna Purchase, for an update on how she’s encountering life after graduating from an ELCA college.

In her original essay, Johnna struggles with the question of whether God has a plan for her life. Particularly, the questions that most concern Johnna relate to dating, and whether there is one right man for her. More broadly, though, Johnna’s piece considers how she might rest in and trust God’s providence, even while she does not know God’s plan for her. She concludes that, vocationally, she must “relax, trust, and let it be” (Copeland 178).

Well, it turns out that Johnna is still working to live into this wise advice several years later. After college, she taught English overseas. She then moved back to the states, landing in Texas where she got a teaching job. Her professional goals are to become a librarian, and to succeed she will need to obtain a master’s degree. However, Johnna took the teaching job first to aggressively pay off her undergraduate student loans. She recently turned 25 and appreciated this birthday as a milestone of sorts. She reflected, “Although I’m not concerned with staying young forever like so much of our society is, [that birthday] has spurred me to be more intentional about going after my professional goals and feeling out how vocation ties into this” (Purchase).

Johnna reports that her time in Texas has presented plenty of challenges vocationally. On the dating scene, she says that since pursuing a notion of holistic vocation is important to her, she’s found—through trial and error—that it can be hard to find a partner with a compatible appreciation. She’s also struggled to find a church community where she feels at home. Interestingly, Johnna writes:

I’ve found actively pursuing the idea of vocation is challenging because many of the people around me don’t have a concept of vocation. I’ve also found that by looking at my life in terms of vocation, I’m isolated from my peers...Finding [typically older] mentors to discuss vocation with has been a struggle too, but I think they could be a great resource because, unlike work peers, true mentors are open to the idea that you want to pursue other degrees and other professional experiences or that you may make choices that prioritize other parts of your vocation instead of being a slave to your job.

Later, Johnna summarizes that she has found the notion of vocation, instilled in her by her ELCA college and faith experiences, difficult to sustain given competing secular values. She concludes:

I’ve found that discovering vocation is a messy, recursive process often without immediately obvious answers and therefore hard. Despite a genuine longing for living my vocation, external pressures—worldly success, financial insecurity, a lack of support of like-minded peers—can sometimes cause me to put off exploring vocation, even as I’ve seen some peers abandon the pursuit altogether (Purchase).

Balancing Acts

Alexandra Benson graduated from an ELCA college three years ago and is pursuing a seminary degree. In college, Alexandra came to appreciate the ways the curriculum and other mission connections encouraged exploration beyond the traditional classroom. As a psychology major, Alexandra explains she never developed a concrete idea of what to do post-graduation, and the search for the “right answer” became, she admits, a sort of obsession. She went after her vocational search with the same diligence she applied to her studies. Alexandra notes, “I was sure there must be one right vocational answer, which at the time I associated almost entirely with finding the perfect career. Surely God was calling me to a specific career in a specific location; my job was to play the part of vocational detective and discover that call” (Benson).

After college, Alexandra spent a year as a full-time volunteer with the Urban Servant Corps program. There she engaged new questions such as:

What does it mean to live out one's vocation within societal webs of injustice in which I am simultaneously oppressed and oppressor? What does it mean to live deeply in intentional community, to be a steward of the environment? What is the role of my own Christian faith in an increasingly pluralistic and global society? How do my gifts best match up with the needs of this world—and what happens when there isn't one right answer? (Benson)

Alexandra concluded our correspondence with two particular insights. First, she noted how she wrestles with the current step (graduate school) on her journey, feeling a tension between earning a degree to prepare for her future, while also finding firm roots in the present—as a friend, roommate, sister, and more. That balance between day-to-day living and preparing for future opportunities is particularly challenging.

“That balance between day-to-day living and preparing for future opportunities is particularly challenging.”

Second, reflecting on her college experience, Alexandra remembers feeling “stretched to the breaking point with classes, extracurricular activities, and work study hours.” Looking back, she wonders whether it would have been possible, as she puts it, to “faithfully say ‘no’ to some opportunities in order to actually foster [her] own vocational wellness and exploration” (Benson).

Minimalism

My third example comes from the blog and published memoir by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, who serves as exemplars of extreme vocational shifts in emerging adulthood. Millburn and Nicodemus are practitioners of and advocates for “minimalism.” Also called voluntary simplicity, Samuel Alexander defines

the movement as, “cultures and affirms what is often called the ‘simple life’ or ‘downshifting’” (Alexander 7). Minimalism emphasizes restraint in purchasing decisions, moderation, and a search for what is truly personally fulfilling.

Millburn's and Nicodemus's discovery of minimalism came after successful careers rising fast in the telecommunications industry. Millburn explains in his book that while his life was full of material wealth including a six-figure salary, luxury car, oversized house, and hundreds of clothes, “There was a gaping void, and working 70–80 hours a week just to buy more stuff didn't fill the void” (“About Joshua & Ryan”). After meeting another minimalist evangelist, they embraced the movement, moved to Montana, started a blog, and eventually produced an award-winning documentary, *The Minimalists*.

In their writings, Millburn and Nicodemus advocate a clear philosophy of vocation. They tell readers to ask, “What is my mission?” and to make sure their personal missions are deeply connected to their passions. “People who do what they love for a living,” he writes, “tend to refer to their work as their mission. Not their job, not their career—their mission” (*Everything That Remains* 117). For Millburn, mission is individual to each person, something people must discover uniquely. Interestingly, *The Minimalists* exhibit a strong sense of calling to their work. Their story is made even more powerful by its drastic shifts from a corporate life consumed with accumulating goods, to one advocating for the exact opposite. They emphasize that freedom from consumerism allows them to more fully enjoy relationships and experiences.

“Freedom from consumerism allows them to more fully enjoy relationships and experiences.”

Takeaways for Colleges and Universities

There are several lessons that Lutheran colleges and universities can learn from the above. I concentrate on three.

Call Out Lies

Much of what we experience in the cultural conversation about work, professional life, and livelihoods raise up paid work as a be-all-end-all. We glamorize work itself without appreciating the difficulties and complexities it raises.²

Take, for example, how work featured in the last presidential election. Gallons of ink were devoted to Donald Trump's concern for the laid-off coal miner and factory workers whose jobs were displaced by automation. Discussion of blue collar workers usually reflects America's founding myths around work: with work comes dignity, we like to tell ourselves. Indeed, the welfare reform bill of the mid-90s enshrined a work requirement, so even our social benefits imply that one's relationship to others is contingent on their job (and not their human dignity).

As Hillary Clinton put it in debate, responding to a question about Islamophobia, of all things: "My vision of America is an America where everyone has a place, if you are willing to work hard, do your part, [and] contribute to the community. That's what America is. That's what we want America to be for our children and our grandchildren" ("Transcript"). And yet, as Jonathan Malesic has pointed out, much of our vocational language and resources fall short when faced with contemporary work realities. What is dignified about working 10 hour shifts for minimum wage scalding headless chickens in a dangerous poultry plant (Grabell)? When in the United States more workers are employed by the fast-food chain Arby's than those who work as coal miners, why do our politicians give such weight to the plight of the miners (Ingraham)? If we value choice and parenting, why are we the only industrialized nation without federal parental leave policies? Might it be that our reverence for work—any work—outweighs our concern for human dignity and community?

Malesic suggests these issues are both cultural and theological. He writes:

The common theological terms used to describe work are not much help in navigating questions that workers face today. How do you recognize, for example, if your work is harming you? How much attention should you give it? How hard should you work? Is it "time theft" to take a mental break from work, given that work is itself a source of stress?

What if you are not paid a living wage? Should you remain in a job even if you are burned out because you need the salary and benefits? To answer these questions, the church's theology of work must be portable and subjective rather than objective and tied to a single "state." It must not overvalue work or drive the overworked even harder. (Malesic)

Indeed, and further, I argue: colleges and universities' posture towards work must be portable and subjective enough not to be tied to a single job, economic system, or cultural era. Our colleges and universities must be willing to challenge the prevailing culture around work. Emerging adults already are. Plus, they can smell inauthenticity a mile away. If we somehow suggest that a magical dignity and happy, easy life comes with employment, we will only appeal to the most gullible of students. The others know—or at least sense—the tough truth around work. It sometimes sucks. It is (too often) dehumanizing. In many segments of our society, the model is in dire need of an overhaul.

"If we somehow suggest that a magical dignity and happy, easy life comes with employment, we will only appeal to the most gullible of students. The others know—or at least sense—the tough truth around work. It sometimes sucks. It is (too often) dehumanizing. In many segments of our society, the model is in dire need of an overhaul."

I once taught a course entitled, "Vocation and the Quest for Life's Purpose." In it, we read Anne-Marie Slaughter's 2012 cover story in *The Atlantic* titled, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All." The piece reflects on Slaughter's own story of vocational wrestling. In 2009, she was dean at Princeton University when she was invited by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton to serve as the first female director of policy planning at the State Department. Two years later, Slaughter found herself resigning for a myriad of vocational reasons, and the article puts her wrestling in the context

of America's struggle with work, gender, and parenting. Slaughter's essay describes her transition from a time in her career when she told young women, "that you *can* have it all and do it all, regardless of what field you are in" to a more nuanced, less rosy reality that appreciates our complex realities of work, partners, family, caring for parents, the economy, and so on. Slaughter writes, "I'd been part, albeit unwittingly, of making millions of women feel that *they* are to blame if they cannot manage to rise up the ladder as fast as men and also have a family and an active home life (and be thin and beautiful to boot)" (Slaughter).

"Our colleges and universities must embrace the tough, difficult truth about work these days."

Students in my vocation course had much to say about Slaughter's argument. Two schools of thought persisted. Some students wrote-off Slaughter's gendered analysis, suggesting that their experiences reflected something like actual equality. Other students, however, admitted the article described some of their anxieties about their plans for work, marriage, children, and travel. Many expressed a desire for balance, but a healthy skepticism about whether it would ever be possible.

Such struggles are real. Our colleges and universities must embrace the tough, difficult truth about work these days. So, for public events, invite to campus emerging adults who can tell their struggle to find life-giving employment—not just the shining stars, but grads who will be honest about the challenges of work. Read Malesic, Slaughter, and others, who call into question cultural stories that say things are all right with work. It is time to be real, admitting to students that they can't have it all, at least not all at the same time. In time, I believe our students will come to thank us for our honesty.

Discovering How to Explore Life

Too often, the word "vocation" becomes a stand-in for "job" or "career." Instead of colleges and universities approaching vocation, primarily, with career in mind, I suggest that framing vocation through the lens of meaning-making as more appropriate for emerging adults today.

Put another way, vocation is not about finding a job; it's about discovering how to explore life well. It's about making meaning of the disparate aspects of life, including, but not limited to, work.

This vocation as meaning-making emphasizes the Christian foundations of vocation, but it's also more expansive. First, theologically speaking, Kathleen Cahalan writes, in a chapter addressing how vocational searching occurs at all stages in life:

Vocation, then, is Christian meaning-making. It refers to the ways we "take in," construct, reconstruct, critique, and identify what is significant in relationship to God and others. God's call comes to us from birth till the end of our days in multiple and varied ways. You experience God's call anew through particular developmental tasks that emerge in each part of the life span. (36)

Cahalan draws from Sharan Daloz Parks' work, emphasizing how the twenties is a time for ongoing searches, dialogues toward truth. So too, Luther Seminary graduate student Allison Siburg, in her thesis on young adult women and vocation, builds from Parks to argue for an understanding of vocation that focuses on *verbs* not *events*. Rather than preparing emerging adults for marriage, kids, and a job, Siburg argues a modern understanding of vocation should focus on verbs like "becoming," "participating," and "cultivating" (10). Siburg's work connects such ongoing work to Lutheran baptismal liturgy ("live," "hear," "serve," "proclaim" and "strive") but, as shown below, such leanings flourish beyond the church as well.

Employing this meaning-making approach at colleges might emphasize *the search* rather than *the job*. When it comes to arguing for the return on investment of a private ELCA education, I admit this approach may make the marketing and communication team nervous. But, given the reality of emerging adulthood, I do think it is worth framing the value of college as the ability to make meaning (and make a living) in our complex world. For a time, one college's tagline was, "lives of worth and service" which does lean towards *process* and not just *outcomes*. Similarly, Concordia College's theme of the core curriculum, "becoming responsibly engaged in the world" affirms the always ongoing nature of learning (see Connell).

At the risk of exaggerating to make the point, in the perfect ELCA college of my imagination, I would make a promise to prospective students and parents that went something like this:

We promise **not** to prepare you for a single career.

We promise **not** to answer life's big questions for you.

We promise **not** to allow you ever to focus on a job over holistic living.

We promise **not** to relieve you of pain over the world's injustice.

We promise **not** to exempt you from a life of deep searching, meaning-making, and commitment to a horizon beyond your own.

Ultimately, if college is about so much more than getting a job, what if college "deliverables" focused on the emerging, changeable nature of young adulthood more than the job market itself?

Vocationally Engaging Your Twenties

Meg Jay's book, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter* takes a helpful approach to emerging adulthood, one that I hope our colleges might embrace. Rather than shaming twentysomethings for not getting their lives together, Jay suggests a series of ways emerging adults might approach their twenties by engaging their vocational potential.

"What if, then, colleges helped graduates approach their twenties as a time to take small, wise steps forward—and not figure it all out?"

The mistake many young adults make—certainly influenced by parents and teachers—is aiming to reach their final job/career goals in their twenties. Very few people will land their dream job in their twenties. Perhaps there was a time when that first job or internship out of college led to a 35-year career in a single company, but for the majority of us, those days have passed.

What if, then, colleges helped graduates approach their twenties as a time to take small, wise steps forward—and not figure it all out? Jay's approach to the issue is helpful because she does not write-off the fact that many young adults will want to travel, date around, have flexible lives, and so on. Jay suggests, though, that even in the midst of such twentysomething experiences, emerging adults can still position themselves towards a profitable path. Jay gives plenty of examples: for a future law student, working as an assistant in a law firm rather than taking a job bartending. For many, volunteering or gaining non-profit experience that builds resumes even while they offer opportunities for adventure. Jay provides dozens of illustrations of emerging adults searching for ways to "grow up" but hesitant to do so due to the enormous range of options before them. Jay's read of the research finds that if "feeling better doesn't come from avoiding adulthood, it comes from investing in adulthood" (170). Aligning with Jay's approach, colleges and universities should clarify reasonable expectations of twentysomething life, emphasizing that it might be used wisely as a time for taking appropriate steps towards long-term vocational goals.

Conclusion

As emerging adulthood becomes cemented into most twentysomethings' experiences, colleges and universities must shift their practices accordingly. We should prepare graduates to enter an ongoing period of thoughtfulness, vocational reflection, and wrestling with difficult life choices. We must admit the fact that twentysomething life has changed, and develop practices that allow for these new realities. At their best, these practices will call out falsehoods about work and the modern economy, focus on ongoing meaning-making throughout one's twenties, and prepare students to engage their twenties in ways that lead to long-term benefits. As the meme goes, "adulting is hard," and that's okay. Let us—students, culture, and colleges together—therefore embrace the vocational challenge.

End Notes

1. Of course, I merely jest that an affection for avocado toast is on par with such financial goals as buying a home or paying off student loans. But others seem to take such a claim seriously. See Cummings, “Millionaire to Millennials.”

2. My thoughts here are particularly influenced by the Catholic thinker, and former college professor, Jonathan Malesic whose writings—from books, magazine articles, to tweets—I highly recommend. Formal citations follow, but additionally, I note how thoroughly my argument in this section relies on Malesic’s scholarship, including several illustrations that appear in his work (e.g. coal miners).

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FLORENCE D. AMAMOTO

Called to Compassion over the Course of a Life: A Buddhist Perspective

If you had asked me before I came to Gustavus Adolphus College, I'm not sure I would have said that Buddhism had a notion of vocation, especially if vocation is defined in the traditional Christian sense of answering God's call, given that Buddhism is non-theistic. However, Gustavus has allowed me to explore my religion more deeply, and has thus led me to a different conclusion. What follows is a short introduction to Buddhism and some reflections on how vocation might be defined within Buddhism.

Buddhism 101

Buddhism grew out of the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, or the historical Buddha, who was born in fourth century BCE in what is now Nepal, and lived and preached in what is now northern India. Siddhartha was the son of the leader of the Sakya clan. Legend has it that his father was told by a seer that his son would be either a great ruler or a great spiritual figure. You don't have to guess which his father preferred, and he raised his son in luxury and shielded him from the outside world. However, as a young man, Siddhartha, on various walks through his town, saw an old man, a sick man, and a dying man. Leaving his wife and son, he sought spiritual enlightenment with a group of ascetics. After seven years, he realized this life of extreme physical deprivation had not gotten him

closer to understanding the suffering he had seen, so he gave up the ascetic life. But he continued to meditate, which ultimately led him to the understanding he had long sought. He started preaching the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which lays out his understanding of the causes of human suffering and the way to end it. The Four Noble Truths are: life is suffering; suffering is caused by ignorance and desire; there is a way to end this suffering; the way is the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path consists of right view, resolve, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. One could argue that a Buddhist is "called" to pursue enlightenment, which is defined as wisdom and compassion.

Enlightenment, in fact, was precisely the goal of early followers of the Buddha, who formed monastic communities and tried to emulate his life. Later, schools developed that put more emphasis on what they saw as the spirit of the Buddha's teachings and emphasized compassion. The ideal compassionate one is a Bodhisattva, a person who has attained enlightenment but stays involved with the world to help others.



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My form of Buddhism, Jodo Shin Shu Buddhism, was founded by a Japanese monk (or ex-monk) Shinran Shonin in the thirteenth century. Theologically, Shinran's beliefs were similar to those of Martin Luther. Shinran believed that he could not reach moral perfection through his own efforts—this was his break with monastic Buddhism. He emphasized instead that we were surrounded by the love and compassion of the universe, personified by Amida Buddha, a non-incarnate Buddha who had vowed to save all sentient beings. This was Buddhism for the masses, the 90 percent of the population who were uneducated and poor. Jodo Shin Shu Buddhism remains the main form of Buddhism practiced in Japan today. It was also the Buddhism of the Japanese immigrants to the United States in the early twentieth century. Included here were my grandparents, whose American-born children helped found the Buddhist temple that I grew up in.

Buddhism does not depend on a particular practice. For instance, my form of Buddhism does not have a sitting meditation practice like Zen. In fact, the Sunday services I attended as a child were modeled on Protestant services by the Buddhist Churches of America, which saw the temples as being places to pass on Japanese religious and cultural traditions, but also to help immigrants assimilate into American society. In my form of Buddhism, the emphasis is on living a life of faith and gratitude—themes shared with the Christian tradition, of course. And yet, until I came to Gustavus, I hadn't thought of my tradition in terms of vocation.

Buddhism and Vocation

As noted above, the Buddha's teaching grew out of his desire to understand and end human suffering. However, Buddha as a title means "the awakened one" or "the enlightened One." The historical Buddha was a man who came to a profound understanding of reality, and passed that understanding on to others. What he realized was that our suffering came from our ignorance, from not seeing reality (for instance, that life is change), as well as from our desires and ego. He also taught that everyone has the capability to become a Buddha. While he taught his followers his insights to help them on their path to enlightenment, he also told them not to take anything on

another's authority—even his—but rather to test what he taught against their own experiences and understanding. In that way, I think Buddhists are called to a life-long search for knowledge and a deeper understanding of life and the world.

In turn, such a deeper understanding of the world and of the human condition, true enlightenment, inevitably leads us to compassion because we see all the suffering around us. I would argue that, although Buddhism does not have an idea of a "caller" God, there is an idea of calling and a caller in Buddhism—we are called to respond to the needs we see around us; we are called by the world. In my form of Buddhism, as in many of the Mahayana schools, there is an emphasis on compassion and selfless giving. It emphasizes that we are constantly surrounded by the love and compassion that exists in the universe. We are called to live a life of gratitude in recognition of this, and to be the conduit of that love and compassion to the world.

"I would argue that, although Buddhism does not have an idea of a 'caller' God, there is an idea of calling and a caller in Buddhism—we are called to respond to the needs we see around us; we are called by the world."

In order to be that conduit for compassion, however, we need more than knowledge. Buddhism teaches we need mindfulness and egolessness. Mindfulness may be obvious; we need to be alert and alive to the moment and to the needs in that particular situation. A good teacher is always alert to capitalize on "the teachable moment," and her instruction will depend on what any particular student needs in that specific moment. One of the Buddha's insights was that we are profoundly interdependent—that I am who I am and indeed can live only because my life is intertwined with everything else. My life depends not just on my parents who brought me into the world, but also on everything from the people who grow my food to the very air I breathe. Increased global ties and environmental

degradation only make being mindful of this insight more important. Valuing mindfulness reminds us that it is important to challenge our students to see as deeply as they can into the interconnections and complexities of the world, so they can see their stake in the world and respond to the call as skillfully as possible.

I think that the Buddhist emphasis on egolessness and the rejection of desire are difficult for Americans, given their emphasis on individualism, self, drive, and success. Part of the problem, I think, is a misunderstanding of what these Buddhist concepts mean. We Americans tend to associate ego with the self and desire with ambition, progress, and success. If we get rid of desire and ego, students often think, wouldn't we become passive? Then where would we be? We need ambition and desire, they argue. And wouldn't being egoless and rejecting desire leave us with no personality, a passive blob?

Buddhism, in fact, argues just the opposite. To help students understand that egolessness can make us more ourselves, I usually ask my students: "When are you more yourself—when you are at a party with a group of strangers or when you are with your best friends?" The reason you are more yourself with your friends is because you are not concerned about how you appear, are not seeking to protect your ego, your sense of self. Ridding ourselves of this ego-concern frees us, allowing us to be more of ourselves, to be more creative and open, to be more vulnerable, and to take more risks. But it also allows us to respond more helpfully to the situations around us. Science has shown that we cannot really multi-task. The less we are taken up with thinking about ourselves, the more internal space we have to hear and see others and their needs more clearly.

Furthermore, in Buddhism, eliminating desire does not mean not caring or not acting. As I noted earlier, we are called to respond to the needs we see around us, to incarnate love in the world. The Buddha knew that no matter how helpful we want to be or how wisely we act, we will not always get what we want. Many of today's pressing problems, such as climate change and inequality, are massive and full of enormous obstacles. It will take people with persistence and resilience, people who act out of vision, faith, and conviction to bend the arc of history. Overcoming desire in the Buddhist sense

does not mean not caring, but rather letting go of seeing particular outcomes within a particular timeframe so that one can go on with the fight. The Dalai Lama's continuing resistance to China is one example. Closer to home I am reminded of a story a white activist friend told me about what a black activist once said to her: "You know, the problem with you white people is that you give up too fast when you don't get the result you want. We know this is going to take a long time."

"Many of today's pressing problems, such as climate change and inequality, are massive and full of enormous obstacles. It will take people with persistence and resilience, people who act out of vision, faith, and conviction to bend the arc of history."

Ultimately, I think Buddhism calls me to become as knowledgeable about life and the world as I can be, but also to become as aware, compassionate, and selfless as I can be. I think I know more now than I did when I was 20 or 40. I hope I am a better conduit for the compassion of the universe—not only wiser but also less concerned about myself, more open, more able to hear and see the needs of others more clearly. Like many things that are simple to say, this is hard to do. It is a life-long journey.

Concluding Reflections

My experiences at Gustavus underscore how encountering religious differences can help us think more deeply about our own religious teachings, faith, and values. Teaching at a Lutheran college prompted me to get more interested in exploring my own religion. It also prompted me to think about vocation—both personal and institutional. My participation in Vocation of a Lutheran College conferences, in national conversations about the vocation of church-related colleges, and in the development of Gustavus's proposal for the Lilly Foundation's Program for

the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) grant, also allowed me to deepen my knowledge of Lutheran ideas of vocation. This, in turn, prompted me to develop the ideas about Buddhism and vocation I've shared here. I also think that my presence and those from other religious traditions (such as the chair of the committee for our PTEV proposal, who was Jewish) has forced Lutherans at Gustavus to think more deeply about Lutheran ideas of vocation. Because of our religious diversity—but also Lutheranism's valuing of dialogue—our PTEV committee was able to hammer out language and programs that would be welcoming for students of all religious affiliations—and none.

“Teaching at a Lutheran college prompted me to get more interested in exploring my own religion. It also prompted me to think about vocation—both personal and institutional.”

The vocation of any college is to provide an excellent education for students and to provide them with tools they need to live healthy and productive lives. Church-related colleges also aspire to produce students who will live lives of leadership and service. This emphasis on values and service is some of the “value added” elements offered by our small, liberal arts, Lutheran schools. We need to be more vocal about the way our values grow out of our Lutheran heritage. And yet, our understanding of that heritage and its application in today's world is enriched by having it in conversation with other religious traditions just as our students' education is enriched by real conversations and interactions with people different from them. The country and our colleges are becoming more diverse, and the world is becoming more interconnected—and, unfortunately, more polarized. We owe it to our students to prepare them for this world. We owe it to the world to prepare leaders who have cultural competence; a vision for a better, more equal and peaceful world; and the skills to be the bridge-builders our world so desperately needs.

VIDYA THIRUMURTHY

Vocation and Dharma throughout Life's Stages: A Hindu Perspective

This essay is an attempt to unpack the meaning of the Lutheran concept of vocation in the context of Hinduism. Not an easy task, and an arduous journey! Anyone coming to the term *vocation* from a different religious tradition could have trouble grasping its deeper meaning—just as I did, and still do. Still, I think that Hinduism has ways of making sense of vocation and calling—and may prove especially helpful for considering how vocation (or one's duty) changes over the course of an individual's life.

My interpretations and reflections of Hinduism are based on my experiences and are modeled to me by my parents, extended family members, and elders of my Indian community. There are wide variations in how individuals practice the religion—some very religious and ritualistic, others more philosophical, still others characterized as atheists and agnostics. This essay is my take on my religious experiences with and philosophic understandings of Hinduism over the years.

I joined Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) in 2005. Even before I officially began my tenure as a faculty member in the education program, I was asked if I would be willing to attend a Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference in Columbus, Ohio. There I was introduced to the concept of vocation within the Lutheran context. For a Hindu, this concept was quite foreign. At PLU, often the conversations on vocation are orchestrated by the Wild Hope Project. The question, "What will you do with your one wild and precious life?" (from Mary Oliver's poem, "The Summer

Day"), is used to facilitate a dialog between faculty members so they can, in turn, guide their students in identifying their vocations. The first step is for faculty members to illustrate how they chose *their* vocations. Since this concept puzzled me, it became one of the main themes of inquiry during my entire term at PLU.

The only definition I had of "vocation" was nonreligious, and in terms of "vocational programs." Eventually, I understood that *vocation* was complex, but I could not wrap my mind around it because I had no reference point within my religion or experiences. This led me to wonder how PLU's non-Lutheran or non-religious constituents—and especially our international students—could engage in a conversation on vocation. Does one need a cultural context or a Lutheran upbringing to grapple with the term? How then are we to help our students? How might I participate in the process?

I came to interpret vocation as "calling," and could connect this to an earlier experience. In the early 1980s, I had the privilege of meeting Mother Theresa in India. I was lucky to talk to her in person. That incident helped me anchor the concept of calling to her, a religious leader. *Calling* was something that true spiritual leaders, such as



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Mother Theresa, had in their own encounters with God. I have also read that Mother Theresa had a decisive, special *calling*, a moment of epiphany, where God called on her to serve the poor when she was travelling from Darjeeling to Calcutta on a train. Serving the poor became her divine calling. This raises the question that if religious gurus have such callings, can a common person also have one? Could the term vocation then simply mean service?

As I attended conferences and meetings on vocation at PLU and in other sister institutions, no one could really assist in clarifying and relating this concept to other religious contexts. There was an assumption that everyone understood what vocation meant. It therefore became my own journey, and it was important for me to grapple with it so I could have a deeper understanding.

Doing One's Dharma

I began to think that, even if vocation's first home is within Christianity, there must be some equivalent terms in Hinduism. This is because I am a firm believer that all religions share some core, common tenets, even if the road we each take may differ. As I ponder it over now, there may be some bridges between finding one's vocation and doing one's dharma.

"In Hinduism, one's dharma varies with age, gender, and occupation."

Dharma, meaning *duty* (or living the right way), is one of the fundamental concepts in Hinduism or Hindu philosophy. The dictionary defines the Hindu notion of dharma as an "individual's duty fulfilled with observance of custom or law." The right way of living is to do one's duty; every individual has to do his/her duty as laid down by the religious scriptures. The key to doing one's duty is to do it without expecting any rewards (duty for the sake of duty), even if one has to make sacrifices in order to fulfill it.

Related to the theme of this particular issue of *Intersections* is the fact that, in Hinduism, one's dharma varies with age, gender, and occupation. India, like other patriarchal societies, still remains divided by gender. (They

have made some strides in breaking the gender divide over the centuries, but with limited success.) Similarly, respect is duly given to people who are older than you, like family elders, older siblings, and so on. Elders, in turn, have particular duties to their progeny. All of this provides something of the unsaid norms of the society.

If a Hindu were to explain the essence of duty/dharma to a child, odds are she or he would reference the *Bhagavad Gita*. Indeed, many believe the essence of Hinduism can be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, also called *The Song of the Lord* or the *Divine Song*. Often referred to as Gita, it is written in Sanskrit language, and is part of the Hindu Epic *Mahabharata* ("Big Battle of Good over Evil"). The Gita is in the form of a dialog between the Pandava prince Arjuna, a warrior, and his chariot driver, Lord Krishna. On the battle field, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna why it is important to carry out one's duties.

The *Bhagavad Gita* calls for one to do one's duties without looking for returns, emphasizing detachment from selfish gains. This conflicts considerably with the motives of a careerist, one who works hard to achieve a goal with a reward and an ulterior motive. The careerist seeks advancement, promotions, and raises. Such ambition conflicts with dharma as described in the *Gita*. Again, there, the fulfilling of one's duty should be without expecting any reward. There is total surrender to fulfilling one's duties—duty to oneself (body, mind, and soul), and duty to others (society and environment). Duty calls for selflessness or sacrifice. So what are the duties of an individual, and what guidelines are provided in the scriptures?

Different Duties over the Course of Life

Here we return to the theme of different vocations—that is, different duties—over the course of a lifetime. For the sake of everyday practices, dharma is commonly divided into four main stages. First there is the duty of children, students, and "bachelors" (or of *Brahmacharya*, typically one to 25 years of age), where one must focus on educating one's mind, respecting and being obedient to elders, and practicing self-discipline. Next, there is the duty of a family person (*Grihastha*, ages 26 to 50), when one has duty to one's spouse, to children and elders in the family, to fellow human beings, and to nature. Next,

there is the duty of grandparents or elders (*Vanaprastha*, 51 to 75 years of age), where one takes on more of a supporting and advisory role for one's family, but also slowly relinquishes responsibilities to the next generation. The fourth and final stage is that of an ascetic or renunciate (*Sanyasa*, 76+ years of age), when individuals are free from all worldly or material desires and prejudices. While *Sanyasa* traditionally refers to a hermit or recluse, most people in this stage today continue to live with their children. Thus, one's duty changes quite dramatically as one moves through life's stages. Still, it is believed that doing one's duty consistently demands selflessness and sacrifice over the whole of a life.

Of course, the division of duty into these stages gets complicated as Hinduism migrates and changes. Economic opportunities have compelled families to move to different parts of India or the world. I know of many families where siblings are scattered between, for example, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Still, when duty calls, many siblings take turns caring for their elderly parents. Often times, instead of having the elderly parents move from one place to another, each family may move temporarily back to the parents' home and provide the necessary care. In these cases, status and wealth have not prevented them from taking care of their elderly parents. Fulfilling their duty is given higher priority. No sacrifice is too big!

Concluding Thoughts

I hope to have given the reader some understanding of the types of duties one has to fulfill throughout one's

life according to Hinduism. Dharma seems to be the driving force in Hinduism, just as vocation is the driver in Lutheranism.

When we interlace the concepts of vocation with duty or dharma, shared components come to surface. Both concepts focus on service to others, being selfless in this service, and the importance of sacrifice. One is called on to fulfill one's duty. Perhaps the biggest difference is that,

"Both contexts—Lutheranism and Hinduism—call on individuals to transform the lives of others while allowing such experiences to transform them."

in one religious context, one is largely introspective to find vocation, and in the other, it is assigned to you "from without" by society and by scripture. Still in both cases, duty and/or vocation is discerned first and foremost by considering oneself as nestled within a network of relationships—those between the young and the old, between me and what the Lutheran tradition calls "the neighbor." One could say that both contexts—Lutheranism and Hinduism—call on individuals to transform the lives of others while allowing such experiences to transform them. By working between and through religious differences, it is certainly possible for us to develop a more inclusive language and to promote the concept of vocation to a wider audience.

Vocation on Campus: Reading Mark Tranvik's *Martin Luther and the Called Life* at Pacific Lutheran University



Most readers of *Intersections* need no introduction to Dr. Mark D. Tranvik, Professor of Religion at Augsburg University. Dr. Tranvik has long been associated with the topic of vocation in Lutheran higher education. He is both a senior fellow at Augsburg's Christensen Center for Vocation, as well as a frequent contributor to conversations about Luther and Lutheranism. This review article examines Tranvik's *Martin Luther and the Called Life* and reads the book against the backdrop of another Lutheran university's reflection on vocation. The

reviewers offer both a student and a faculty member's perspective on vocation and its roots in the Lutheran tradition. We read Tranvik's text in connection with a Fall 2017 course on Reformation History taught at



Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma, Washington), and then interviewed a selection of students and faculty about vocation at Pacific Lutheran University's Wild Hope Center for Vocation. We found *Called Life* to be an excellent learning resource for faculty and students, with a compelling view of vocation that is well-suited to the evolving contexts of Lutheran higher education. The book also brought up some intriguing questions about best practices for introducing vocational reflection that we couldn't definitively answer. We suspect that similar conversations are taking place at many ELCA-affiliated schools in North America.

Examining *Martin Luther and the Called Life*

Tranvik's 174-page text introduces the Lutheran concept of vocation through the teaching and life experiences of Martin Luther (1483-1546), a German church reformer who held an assortment of roles in life including son, student, monk, professor, spouse, parent, and community leader. As the text explores these roles it serves as a short biography of Luther, highlighting the reformer's major struggles and achievements. In Chapter 1, Tranvik

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begins by exploring early Christian concepts about being in the world, biblical passages related to vocation, and the Western monastic impulse that so strongly shaped religious life. As the medieval period ended, the people with the most conspicuous religious callings were the cloistered monks and nuns, who led lives “characterized by poverty, chastity, and obedience” (12). Through their vows and duties, they aimed to be closer to their Creator than ordinary members of society.

“Baptism not only anchors the Christian believer in Christ, but also offers a powerful model for understanding God’s gracious activity and daily call to love and service.”

In Chapter 2, Tranvik explores Luther’s life experience and theology, emphasizing the young monk’s search for meaning and his eventual decision to reject the monastery and explore new roles as a preacher, teacher, spouse, and citizen. As he progressed through these changes, Luther listened not to his own voice, but to a Word and call residing outside his experience—what Luther perceived to be a direct invitation from God. In Chapter 3, Tranvik summarizes Luther’s theology of baptism and the salutary role of this “forgotten sacrament.” Tranvik is at his best when discussing baptism, in part because he has analyzed the sacrament carefully in other writings. Tranvik emphasizes that baptism not only anchors the Christian believer in Christ, but also offers a powerful model for understanding God’s gracious activity and daily call to love and service (59). Baptism offers assurance in the face of life’s trials and temptations, and it draws the Christian believer outward, reconnecting the baptized to the present needs of the community, the neighbor, and the created world.

In *Part II: The Called Life*, Tranvik continues to use Luther as a model for vocational reflection, but he shifts to address more contemporary concerns. As he examines specific aspects of Luther’s world (his life, his relationships, his church, and his political setting), Tranvik argues that Luther continually found his grounding in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and Christ’s summons for service and

discipleship in the world. Tranvik rejects what he sees as the prevailing tendency among modern historians to “see Luther as the herald of modern individualism” (65). Such an understanding strips God’s influence from the believer, a divestment that seems preferable for many, but not theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who Tranvik understands as basing the Christian life on being “called to compassion and action... by the sufferings of their brothers and sisters, for whose sake Christ suffered” (119).

Tranvik continues the theme of social engagement in Chapter 6, encouraging readers to be active in the world and function politically when necessary. He is careful to recommend humility as Christians enter the public realm; however, just as “Luther was weary of identifying any political program as ‘Christian,’” so too must we ensure that we don’t use “the Bible to prescribe how people should live” (112, 123). In most respects, we ought to rely on human reason to order daily affairs.

Luther taught that Christians are justified by Christ through grace. As a result, they participate in Christ through an exchange of divine and human attributes. In response, Christians should not separate themselves from the world and strive for further holiness; rather, they should be flexible in the face of God’s call and meet Christ in the world, for God is found not among the comfortable, but among the suffering. Tranvik carefully explains the consequence of this theology: it expands the concept of vocation beyond our own notions of purpose and success, and in doing so it fights the temptation of equating *vocation* with

“Christians should not separate themselves from the world and strive for further holiness; rather, they should be flexible in the face of God’s call and meet Christ in the world, for God is found not among the comfortable, but among the suffering.”

occupation. On this point he writes: “Luther never conflated work with vocation. A person is always called, whether one has a job or not” (160). Our roles as spouses, children, parents, citizens, and peers are all held to one truth: “we

are fallen creatures saved by grace and not our good works...we are commanded to love our neighbors, take care of creation, seek justice in society and keep a special eye out for the vulnerable, weak, and marginalized" (120).

Vocation at Pacific Lutheran University

Mark Tranvik's book makes a strong case for using Luther's life and theology as a focal point for modern discussions about vocation, and he recovers the importance of community service for people who are active in Lutheran organizations. To examine the application of these ideas, the present authors ask: How has the language of vocation been used at Pacific Lutheran University, an ELCA-affiliated institution founded by Norwegian Lutheran pioneers and located in Parkland, a suburb of Tacoma?

Language addressing the Lutheran understanding of vocation was used in the founding documents of Pacific Lutheran Academy (later PLC and PLU) during the school's establishment in 1890. The institution's Lutheran identity was a regular topic of conversation in the following decades, and like many Lutheran-affiliated schools, the discussion reflected broader debates about higher education and religion in public life. In the 1970s and 1980s, two questions took center stage. First, was the institution essentially a "church" or a "college" (and what was the difference)? Second, what role should religion play in campus programming and in key documents like the mission statement? Something that seemed unique about PLU was its cultural setting in the Pacific Northwest, a region known for its conspicuous lack of organized religion. As PLU faculty member Patricia O'Connell Killen described in a volume entitled *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, the region is one of the least-churched areas of the country. This dynamic means that traditional Christian language is not well understood by our students, most of whom come to PLU from the surrounding area. To be a Lutheran university in this setting presents both opportunities and challenges. Among the difficulties is how to introduce theological language about topics such as vocation, justification by faith, and service to students who have little exposure to Lutheranism or organized

religion. (Currently, Lutheran-identified students account for about 15 percent of PLU's student body.)

In 2002, PLU applied for and received a Lilly Foundation grant to explore the topic of vocation and its relation to university life. Internally, the project became known as "Wild Hope," and the grant strongly influenced conversations about what it means to be a "Lutheran" institution of higher education for students, faculty, and community members. The project's core question for students emerged as: "What will you do with your one wild and precious life?" (The query is adapted from Mary Oliver's poem, "The Summer Day"). Beneath this call to vocational reflection, the project added several follow-up questions, including "What are you called to be and to do?" and "How will you make a

"Guiding student and faculty reflection on vocation is not without its challenges."

genuine contribution to the world?" A Center for Vocation was established on campus in the aftermath of the grant, and students now participate in off-campus retreats as well as on-campus events and programming that highlight vocational discernment.

In the early 2000s, PLU revised its mission statement to further promote vocational reflection. The mission statement now reads, *PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care—for other people, for their communities and for the Earth*. The revision process had its detractors, including those who worried that removing specific references to "God," "Jesus," and other expressions of the Christian tradition might undermine the institution's historic connection to Christianity and/or Lutheranism. However, after fifteen years of programming it seems that the effort to broaden the understanding of vocation while also accentuating its Lutheran elements has been successful. Guiding student and faculty reflection on vocation is not without its challenges, however. As one student wrote in 2006, "Wild Hope teaches students a language of asking these deep, heart-wrenching, mind-boggling questions. But beyond PLU's borders, it's usually a foreign language" (Nordquist 94).

Called to be a Student

According to PLU student Alex Lund, the challenge for Lutheran-affiliated universities today is to use language that resonates with all students. At PLU, undergraduates come from a variety of backgrounds, and the University is actively engaged in outreach to build a student body that is diverse in terms of age, financial background, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. To introduce students to the concept of vocation, newcomers are typically asked, “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” This question, reinforced by PLU’s mission statement, often presents a challenge to new Lutes. We are asked to justify our goals and expectations about college—and our future life—relatively quickly. If you are among the many transfer students entering the university, the pace is even faster. However, although vocational reflection does not come easily for some, students are offered many examples of what service in the world means, and we frequently study challenging topics that relate to the wider world and its needs. To be honest, some students get a bit lost during this discernment, while others come through dramatically engaged. However, I have seen students find their calling and vocation at PLU—it happens all the time, and often through a process of reflection that Mark Tranvik describes in *The Called Life*.

“I have come to recognize that God’s ‘absence’ in public language is in itself a kind of welcome to the outsider.”

As a student with an ELCA background (one of the 15 percent), I am drawn to more Lutheran expressions of vocation than some, and I find it valuable to hear God-specific language in on-campus conversations. At first, I found it frustrating to see how this language was sometimes limited to certain times and places. For example, we rarely hear about “God” or “Jesus” in major speeches or events on campus. Likewise, it is rather unusual to hear readings from Jewish, Christian, or Muslim scriptures in public settings (though in classrooms, this is a regular occurrence when it relates to the subject at hand). However, I have come to recognize that God’s “absence” in

public language is in itself a kind of welcome to the outsider. As a Christian, I believe that God is always present on our campus, whether God is specifically named or not. In addition, I am welcomed to attend chapel or our University Congregation, both of which are operated in inclusive ways.

I know that PLU has been called to be more than just an institution that educates Lutherans; PLU is called to educate individuals from diverse backgrounds, and to address inequality in our world. Numerous faith traditions operate on campus, and the place is richer for it.

A Faculty Perspective on Vocation

According to history faculty member Michael Halvorson, thinking about vocation is a little like thinking about what it means to be a Christian or a member of any religious tradition—you’ll probably get a different answer about what it is from whomever you ask. One of the important questions raised in this review is not whether vocational reflection is important, but how it is initially raised on campus, i.e. whether vocation should be discussed without direct reference to “God’s call” or other language that specifically connects to the Lutheran heritage. Should we use more inclusive speech to draw students into thinking about vocation? Even if that means we are changing or diluting our Lutheran approach?

In *The Called Life*, Tranvik suggests that many partners are necessary (and welcome) in discussions about vocation. However, he also cautions that leaders in Lutheran colleges run the risk of turning the conversation into “vocation lite” if they neglect the *calling role* that God plays in the invitation to service (9). Near the end of his book, Tranvik further emphasizes what he sees as the critical value of recognizing God’s presence in the world:

Our task is to equip people with the eyes to see God at work in their lives and in their world. God’s great Word of grace and freedom is meant for the world. And people need help to think about ways to resist a culture that would prefer religion to either go away or be a private matter. (168)

I recognize the power and significance of this statement. To implement this vision in a way that contemporary

students will understand, however, I believe that it is best to use intentionally inclusive language and a historical perspective. A historical perspective allows students and faculty to see how vocational reflection has changed over time, and how a university like PLU continues to reflect on its core beliefs and values. One such belief is that God is continually at work in the world, a world that God loves and deems good. God's love extends powerfully to human beings, and as an aspect of this love, God calls people to serve their neighbors and care for the earth. Following Luther and others, a Lutheran university may choose to describe this call as an invitation that powerfully shapes a person's identity. It is a call to vocational reflection that deepens relationships with others and with the world, despite the world's messiness and problems.

A hallmark of Lutheran education is that it draws students, faculty, and community members to a greater appreciation of life on this earth in all its diversity and complexity. In this dynamic world, some believe that God

is truly present and active; others do not know or are not sure. Despite a variety of beliefs on the matter, students in a university are not called to escape the world of reflection and inquiry, but to engage with it using their distinctive aptitudes and skills. Mark Tranvik's *The Called Life* invites us into this complex, messy world with its many roles, needs, and opportunities. The book offers important insights about Luther's own life story, as well as how people in the contemporary world can engage church and society in meaningful ways.

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COURTNEY WILDER

Luther, the Catechisms, and Intellectual Disability

The five-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation has brought Martin Luther into public consciousness in a fresh way. One question that emerges as we compare the origins of the Lutheran tradition with modern faith communities is what resources, if any, does Luther's writings offer for people with disabilities? This is a treasure hunt with both dead ends and rich rewards. Although Luther's own response to people with disabilities is starkly problematic at times, both Luther's *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism* offer substantial resources for a Lutheran theology of inclusion and the basis to recognize the full humanity of people with disabilities as faithful children of God.

Disability and Religious Participation

The experience of disability, while sometimes regarded as anomalous or unusual, is in fact both commonplace and, presuming a person lives long enough to become aged, almost inevitable. About 12.6 percent of people living in the United States have disabilities; census data indicates that this percent has remained steady for several years (Annual Disability 38). Among people over the age of 65, over one-third are identified as disabled (7). People with disabilities are underrepresented in American religious communities, however. A study produced by the Kessler Foundation and the National

Organization on Disability called "The ADA, 20 Years Later" finds:

Half of people with disabilities (50 percent) state that they attend religious services at least once per month.

However, 57 percent of people without disabilities do the same—a gap of 7 percentage points. The gap between

people with and without disabilities in terms of attendance at religious services is almost identical to that in 2004 and all previous years with the exception of 2000 when this gap was wider at 18 percentage points. (12)

The Kessler Foundation/National Organization survey identifies a series of interrelated issues that may impact church attendance. For example, people with disabilities are likely to have fewer transportation options and lower income than those without disabilities (3). Other research suggests that families with a child who has a disability do not find congregations well prepared to meet their family's needs, and often do not even ask what those needs might be. Churches are not necessarily welcoming (Ault 54).



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Theological Issues

While architectural barriers, lack of access to transportation, and lack of support of people with disabilities in participating in congregation life all contribute to the problem of exclusion of people with disabilities from Christian communities, there are also issues with religious teaching. Christian religious doctrines are mixed in terms of their recognition of people with disabilities as eligible for full Christian practice. People with disabilities

“Christian religious doctrines are mixed in terms of their recognition of people with disabilities as eligible for full Christian practice.”

may be regarded within Christian communities as having been punished by God, or as otherwise unsuited for being part of Christian congregations. Theologian of disability Nancy Eiesland describes this as the “disability-sin conflation” (Eiesland 72). She argues that the biblical record and centuries of Christian practice have created systemic marginalization of people with disabilities:

In order for the Christian church to stop doing harm and energize their efforts to be a body of justice, critical and careful attention must be given to a theology of disability as an established feature of the systematic theological enterprise...The consequences of relegating a theology of disability to an occasional and peripheral concern can be disastrous not only for people with disabilities but also for institutional integrity and justice. (Eiesland 75)

People with intellectual disabilities are particularly neglected by mainstream Christian doctrine. The American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), an advocacy organization promoting among other things the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities, offers this description: “Intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive

behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills” (“Frequently Asked”). The AAIDD holds that “limitations in individuals often coexist with strengths, and that a person’s level of life functioning will improve if appropriate personalized supports are provided over a sustained period” (“Frequently Asked”). Put plainly, people with intellectual disabilities are members of families and communities; like all other people they need support to flourish, and also like all other people they have meaningful gifts to contribute to the communities to which they belong. This includes churches. Unfortunately, churches have not always seen people with intellectual disabilities as full members of the body of Christ.

One problem is that some religious communities may have difficulty recognizing the desire and capacity for faith among people with intellectual disabilities. Anglican theologian John Swinton argues, “For many of us whose roots lie within the Reformed theological tradition, there is often the idea that literacy and verbal assent to intellectual formulations are inseparable companions in the quest for authentic faith” (Swinton 22). This formulation of faith as belief, and the capacity to express that belief, leaves people whose expressive language or whose ability to absorb a series of complex religious doctrines is minimal outside the boundaries of Christian faith. Swinton continues, “Certainly our intellect and cognitive capacities help us to participate with God in ways relevant to our current understanding of reality. However, the essence of our relationship of grace is that it is initiated and sustained by God in a way that lies

“The theological problem is not people’s capacity for faith, but a skewed understanding of what faith entails.”

outside our current understanding, and as such is independent of our cognitive capabilities” (Swinton 22). Thus, as Eiesland argues, a critical examination of religious doctrine is necessary to address the injustice of exclusion of people with disabilities from the church. The theological problem is not people’s capacity for faith, but a skewed understanding of what faith entails.

One place to begin this work is to reexamine constructs of faith. People with intellectual disabilities can certainly express religious faith and identity, and people who do not have the capacity for that expression can nevertheless demonstrate recognition of sacred ritual and sacred space. Susan Speraw interviewed parents of children diagnosed with a significant disability; she argues, "Even in the case of children who had severe or profound disabilities that limited their participation in services, parents focused on their child's potential for spiritual connection to God or their ability to remind others of God's presence" (Speraw 221).

Religious communities were sometimes profoundly supportive of the religious identity and experiences of people with intellectual disabilities. One father reported, discussing his priest's response to his daughters, both of whom have significant intellectual disabilities:

The priest told me he had faith in their ability to learn, or at least to be close to God in their hearts, even if they couldn't talk. Where I went to church before, we were anonymous as a family. Now, the kids enjoy being in church and we are welcomed. For me it is a joy to be there and the praying I get to do is a gift. Being in our church now makes me feel as if God never left my side. (Speraw 224)

However, many families reported experiences of exclusion and isolation. Their family members were dismissed when seeking to contribute to congregations; parents were expected to provide their children's own religious education.

Other research demonstrates that people with intellectual disabilities can have strong religious identities. Eleanor Liu, who interviewed young men and women with autism or intellectual disabilities about their religious lives, argues that

Faith...contributes to a sense of connection and thriving among young people with [intellectual and developmental disabilities]. Young people addressed how faith helped them navigate difficult circumstances and provided critical support at key times. Their relationships with God and with people in their

faith communities were important to them and a source of flourishing in life. (Liu et al. 399)

Moreover, the young people she interviewed "spoke of their disability as a gift to be shared...most considered themselves to be loved, valued, and understood by God... These opinions do offer another perspective, contrary to prevailing societal and professional views that disability is something that needs to be fixed, solved, or changed" (Liu et al. 399). Liu suggests that religious communities need to be better equipped to support the spiritual formation of young people with intellectual disabilities (400). She also points out that "individuals whose support needs are more intensive and communication challenges more complex may be most prone to having their spiritual preferences and needs overlooked" (Liu 395).

Before turning to Lutheran teaching in the catechisms as a source for a theology of inclusion of people with disabilities, we must honestly and critically examine some of Luther's views on disability.

Problems with Luther

Luther is not typically regarded as an enlightened thinker on issues of disability (and rightfully so), although he is not alone in this among Christian theologians. Luther has, for example, frequently been critiqued in the modern era for his words about a twelve-year-old child from Dessau whom he encountered. The child seems to have had symptoms of Prader-Willi Syndrome—a complex genetic disorder affecting appetite, growth, metabolism, cognition, and behavior. The child "devoured as much as four farmers did, and did nothing else than eat or excrete" ("*Table Talk*" 397). Luther is reported to have suggested that the child should be suffocated "...because I think he's simply a mass of flesh without a soul. Couldn't the devil have done this, inasmuch as he gives such shape to the body and mind even of those who have reason that in their obsession they hear, see, and feel nothing? The devil is himself their soul" (397). A later account of the exchange reports that Luther "had himself seen and touched the boy and that he advised the prince of Anhalt to have the boy drowned" (396-97 n.140). Some defend Luther here, arguing that he in no way intended these

views to be dogma or otherwise generalizable (Schofield). Still, it is this version of the story that has lodged itself into the broader consciousness. In fact, as recently as 1964, the belief that Luther consistently held this deplorable view was powerful enough that it was cited in a court case; this report of Luther's words, and the subsequent line of thinking, has influenced religious reflection on the inherent value of people with disabilities.

In short, Luther's response to the child he encountered—presuming some germ of the story is historical—was the opposite of what we might hope for. The rejection of this child from the church and the association of a person with disabilities with the devil are deeply unsettling. The suggestion that a person might be without a soul violates the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* (the person as created in the image of God), which is central to Christian belief and practice. It also serves to support ableism (the discrimination against people with disabilities), which has been practiced within Christian communities, and given theological support, for centuries.

"In short, Luther's response to the child he encountered—presuming some germ of the story is historical—was the opposite of what we might hope for."

As Luther's thinking changed over time, he became more open to the notion of infants with significant disabilities being baptized as other Christian infants were. While in 1532 he indicated that he was opposed to baptism in the case of children born with significant disabilities (Miles 22), "By 1539 Luther was ready to tell a questioner that changelings should indeed be baptized, because during the first year one could not tell that they were changelings" (22). The notion that a child whose appearance or behavior was so unusual that it might be a "changeling"—that is, an infant whom malevolent, supernatural forces had swapped out for the original baby—is common in Medieval folklore, although it is difficult to know whether parents of infants who would now be diagnosed with disabilities believed this explanation or

not. In any case, Luther does not suggest withholding baptism even if there might be some suspicion that a baby is a changeling. Miles argues that

throughout his career as a religious and social reformer, Luther repeatedly made written and spoken comments in which children and adults with disabilities...were understood to have full human value and were considered worthy members of the Church...As against this, Luther had some beliefs and some doubts in the area of devilry, changelings and witchcraft...The balance of Luther's published writings in which adults and children with disabilities were treated with respect in various practical ways, as against some written and reported prejudicial comments, appears to be weighted strongly towards the positive. (34)

Given this mixed record, we might well ask: what does Luther have to offer people with significant disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities? What of his writing might be faithfully and thoughtfully used in modern Christian response to disability? One very useful resource is Luther's educational writing. Luther provides the *Small Catechism* and the *Large Catechism* for Christians seeking to understand and practice their faith more fully. These instructional texts, written in 1529 for ordinary lay Christians, have remained influential for centuries. Both of the catechisms provide a construct of faith that is useful for Christians with and without disabilities who seek a theological basis for more inclusive congregational life.

Resources within Luther's Catechisms

Luther's understanding of faith and of the mechanism of salvation is often described with the shorthand "salvation by grace through faith." What this shorthand does not always clearly convey is that God's gracious activity (that is, God's gift to human beings) is not only providing salvation, but also in providing the faith through which people experience a relationship to God. Luther's reflection on the Apostle's Creed includes a reflection on this process.

The Apostle's Creed

The Third Article of the Apostle's Creed reads as follows: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" (*Small Catechism* 17). In the *Small Catechism* Luther writes the following commentary: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (17).

"Faith is not fundamentally about a person's intellectual capacity or accomplishments. It is, Luther says, rather an experience of being called and led into Christian community and relationship with Christ by the Holy Spirit."

Several aspects of this analysis are applicable to the faith experiences of people with intellectual disabilities. Luther is emphatic that it is not through the work or virtue of the Christian that he or she comes to know God or have faith; the individual's "understanding or strength" is not at issue. Thus Luther suggests that a person's capacity for understanding does not correlate with his or her ability to have faith. Faith may include, for many people, an intellectual grasp of the elements of the Christian tradition, and indeed, Luther is writing his catechisms in order to provide Christians with the opportunity to better understand their faith. But faith is not *limited* by a person's intellectual abilities, because faith is not fundamentally about a person's intellectual capacity or accomplishments. It is, Luther says, rather an experience of being called and led into Christian community and relationship with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Just as the AAIDD argues, "limitations in individuals often coexist with strengths" ("Frequently Asked"). This is true for all people, not only people with

intellectual disabilities, and Luther's account of the work of the Holy Spirit is that it does not depend on either limitations or strengths. Faith is reflective of the work of God in human beings; it is not the result of human effort.

In Luther's *Large Catechism* he writes the following in his commentary on the Third Article of the Creed:

Just as the Son obtains dominion, whereby He wins us, through His birth, death, resurrection, etc., so also the Holy Ghost effects our sanctification by the following parts, namely, by the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting; that is, He first leads us into His holy congregation, and places us in the bosom of the Church, whereby He preaches to us and brings us to Christ. (*Large Catechism* paragraph 37)

Luther argues here that the Holy Spirit works through Christian congregations. What this suggests is that failure of congregations to provide an inclusive community of fellowship and worship does not align with the will of God. The Spirit works by means of the church, and so one important role of the church is to gather in people of faith, regardless of ability or disability, to create a Christian community. Nowhere does Luther suggest that only people who have established a certain degree of expertise in Christian doctrine or biblical exegesis are welcome; indeed, this would be at odds with his understanding of baptism, as we will see below, and contrary to the notion that God provides people with their Christian faith. There should be no expectation of any particular capacity or level of accomplishment for people who want to practice their Christian faith by gathering with others.

Moreover, Luther writes explicitly in the *Small Catechism* that "the whole Christian church on earth" (*Small Catechism* 17) is called, gathered, enlightened, and made holy. This whole church includes people with intellectual disabilities, not just people without disabilities. John Swinton argues,

The absence of a certain level of cognitive capability does not exclude a person from the experiential spirituality made manifest in loving relationships. Authentic religious faith thus understood is a matter

of an “existential commitment to the reality of the divine as made manifest within relationships, which determines the basic character of a person’s life.” (Swinton 25)

This experience of faith and love, both given and received, does not depend on intellectual capacity.

Petitions of the Lord’s Prayer

Luther’s reflections in the catechisms on the Lord’s Prayer are also useful in building a theology that is inclusive of people with disabilities. In response to the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Save us from the time of trial,” Luther writes in the *Small Catechism*, “God tempts no one...we pray that God would guard us and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other shame and vice...” (21). What sort of vice should we be alert to in our focus on disability?

“Ableism is a sin, much as other forms of social oppression are sinful.”

Theologians of disability have long argued that ableism is a sin, much as other forms of social oppression are sinful. Nancy Eiesland writes,

Christ’s body, the church, is broken, marked by sin, divided by disputes, and exceptional in its exclusivity. Church structures keep people with disabilities out; church officials affirm our spiritual callings but tell us there is no place for our bodies to minister; and denominations lobby to gain exception from the governmental enforcement of basic standards of justice. There is no perfect church as there is no “perfect” body. (Eiesland 108)

Eiesland names the act of excluding people with disabilities as a sin, and provides a reminder: there is no perfect body. The Seventh Petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “Deliver us from evil.” Luther interprets the Seventh Petition, “We

pray...that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul,” and when writing on the Sixth Petition Luther names “the devil, the world, and our flesh” as possible sources of deception and evil (*Small Catechism* 21-22). Certainly our political and social world provides reinforcement for the idea that people with disabilities do not really matter, do not really deserve access to education, opportunities for employment, support in maintaining their health, and the regard of their communities in the same way that able-bodied people do. Able-bodied people can maintain the illusion that their own bodies are perfect by drawing sharp contrasts between themselves and people with disabilities, and enforcing these contrasts with exclusionary practices. Eiesland helps us identify this as the kind of sin Luther writes about.

Luther expands on the temptations provided by the world in the *Large Catechism*:

Next comes the world, which offends us in word and deed, and impels us to anger and impatience. In short, there is nothing but hatred and envy, enmity, violence and wrong, unfaithfulness, vengeance, cursing, raillery slander, pride and haughtiness, with superfluous finery, honor, fame, and power, where no one is willing to be the least, but every one desires to sit at the head and to be seen before all. (paragraph 103)

Luther identifies the desire to elevate oneself above one’s neighbors, especially in social status, as one of the temptations the world dangles before the Christian. This is connected with a construct of faith as belief, that is, as an intellectual accomplishment on the part of the Christian rather than a gift from God that does not depend on a person’s ability or capacity. Any belief that people with intellectual disabilities cannot fully participate in Christian communities depends on a mistaken and sinful belief that faith is an accomplishment that elevates one above the neighbor.

Baptism

Finally, Luther’s teaching on baptism is another possible source for an inclusive theology of disability. In the *Small Catechism*, Luther writes that the call for baptism is from Matthew 28: “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.” Luther’s reading of the text does not indicate any exclusion of any kind in that instruction. While the history of colonialist practices of evangelizing based upon this instruction is clearly problematic, the idea that “all nations” are eligible to be baptized as Christians reinforces the fundamental inclusiveness of baptism as a sacrament. The verse clearly does not say: baptize all people except those with disabilities, nor does Luther read it to say that.

“Luther favored the baptism of infants, arguing both that they are capable of faith, and that even if this were not the case, the power of the sacrament does not depend upon human beings.”

In the next two passages in the *Small Catechism*, Luther emphasizes the pairing of baptism with belief, which at first blush might seem to reinforce a minimum requirement of verbal expression of faith for those being baptized. However, Luther favored the baptism of infants, arguing both that they are capable of faith, and that even if this were not the case, the power of the sacrament does not depend upon human beings. Kirsi Stjerna argues that Luther’s teaching is that

we should both assume the reality of children’s faith in terms of their salvation and remember that baptism is given for the sake of that faith to be received and nurtured. Infant baptism is a case in point that baptism is not necessary for salvation as such, just as no human act or intent is. Baptism is a sure deliverer of what the Word promises and does. That salvation is a gift implies that the faith that receives God is also a gift. (Stjerna)

We must note here explicitly that people, especially adults, with disabilities should not be infantilized or have their capacities diminished for rhetorical purposes; however, Luther’s theological development of the

sacrament of baptism and encouraging infant baptism is useful in setting aside any argument that intellectual disability precludes exclusion from Christian faith. As Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*,

We are not so much concerned to know whether the person baptized believes or not; for on that account Baptism does not become invalid; but everything depends upon the Word and command of God. This now is perhaps somewhat acute but it rests entirely upon what I have said, that Baptism is nothing else than water and the Word of God in and with each other, that is when the Word is added to the water, Baptism is valid, even though faith be wanting. For my faith does not make Baptism, but receives it. (paragraph 52)

This suggests that a person does not have to demonstrate his or her faith, or even the capacity for expression of faith, in order to receive baptism. Thus baptism is appropriately offered to people with disabilities, regardless of capacity. This confirms the right of people of all abilities to be baptized into the church and regarded as full members of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

Lutheran theology gives a powerful account of grace as the source of our faith and separates the cause of faith from human attributes or accomplishments. Intellectual capacity cannot be a requirement for salvation; thus belief understood as “assent to doctrine” cannot be the whole of faith. Luther offers a strong critique of the values of the world as sinful; the elevation of some people over others within the church based on a flawed assessment of their ability to have faith is an example of this sinful thinking. He affirms that all people are eligible for baptism, including infants. The ability to make a statement of faith is not a requirement. Rejection of people with disabilities (or people on grounds of race or other features of their identity, including sexual orientation or gender identity) directly contradicts Luther’s interpretations of the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the sacrament of baptism.

While the notion of salvation by grace, through faith is deeply resonant for Lutherans, explicit consideration of faith as a gift to people with disabilities is less common, both in academic theological reflection and in the daily life of the church. Luther's analysis of disability requires careful interpretation and in some cases outright rejection, but there is still a great deal in Luther's most accessible texts that provides clear affirmation of people with disabilities as rightful members of Christian communities.

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JON MICHEELS LEISETH

Lutheran Higher Education in the Land of Anxiety

“Anxiety, there are some things I want to say to you—OK, there are actually quite a few things I want to say to you, but we only have a few moments. You’re busy. I get it. In fact, when I returned to Concordia September 2016, the single thing that surprised me the most was your presence on campus—you’re *everywhere!*”

“I think you need to back off. I’m talking about your relationship with Student Body. Here’s the thing: Student Body is just not themselves when you’re around. Haven’t you noticed? It’s like they’re vibrating. Like they can’t land. They can’t focus. Or think clearly. They don’t sleep well. Sure, it’s exciting when you’re around. You come on like a roller coaster. But eventually, you’re plain old exhausting.

“Student Body asked me to talk with you. They need time to catch their breath. They said they want out, Anxiety. That’s why they asked me to talk with you. They told me about how you’ve been showing up lately. They said they don’t want to keep on like this. They don’t want to always be ramped up, worried that you’re going to pop up. They want to focus on school and when you’re around it’s like they’re always in crisis mode. Sometimes, they said to me (and these are *their* words), they can’t even see what’s going on around them—they can’t see today, let alone life after graduation.

“Student Body wants their life back, Anxiety. Lately, it’s like they’re not even present in their own life at all. They told me to tell you to leave them alone.”

In September of 2016, I left behind my wife and kids (temporarily), my South African “family” and home (physically), and my work as Associate Country Coordinator of the ELCA’s Young Adults in Global Mission, or YAGM, program in Southern Africa (permanently). I returned to the United States in order to begin working as Minister for Faith and Spirituality in Action with Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. I expected my return to be challenging. I anticipated jet lag. I envisioned some difficulty in reorienting to walking on the right-hand side of

sidewalks and hallways, to driving on the right side of the road. I predicted using some words that didn’t translate to United States English conversation (i.e. “Eish!”) and pronouncing a few others like a Brit (i.e. “herb”). I expected disorientation in shifting from several cultures which value relationship, tradition, and the communal over task, innovation, and the individual. I expected to face my own anxiety upon occasion. What I did not expect was the visceral and pervasive presence of anxiety throughout the college community.

Jon Micheels Leiseth serves as Minister for Faith and Spirituality in Action at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Prior to this, Leiseth lived in South Africa with his wife, Rev. Tessa Moon Leiseth and their kids, Isaac and Sophia. Tessa and Jon served as Country Coordinator and Associate for the ELCA’s Young Adults in Global Mission program in Southern Africa.



A few months into my work with Concordia, and in the midst of a conversation with my colleague, Dr. Michelle Lelwica (Chair of Concordia's Religion Department and author of *Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement*), I found myself again referencing this tangible and common experience of a communal, even cultural anxiety. Our fuller conversation included discussing my recent research into healing trauma.

"What I did not expect was the visceral and pervasive presence of anxiety throughout the college community."

Dr. Lelwica suggested that perhaps anxiety is a sort of constant, low-lying trauma. This thought built a bridge to my introductory work with trauma, work which drew from my own daily practices and came to fruition as my master's thesis for Luther Seminary. The thesis combined the creation of a holistic six week daily healing practice with a theoretical paper grounded in the work of Bessel van der Kolk and Serene Jones, and in healing stories, such as that of Matthew Sanford. Dr. Lelwica's comment connecting anxiety and trauma opened my eyes to insights, resources, and practices which might be helpful in our shared commitment to students' whole selves.

My intent here is to contribute to the ongoing conversation about young adults, anxiety, and college. The connection between anxiety and trauma can shine light on an area of particular importance in Lutheran higher education, namely vocation, with its interwoven relationship with storytelling.

Discerning Vocation in Crisis

Can one creatively discern present and future vocations while under duress, while experiencing anxiety, or otherwise in crisis mode? I once discussed this question with Philip Knutson, a regional representative with the ELCA. Knutson was spending time with the 2012-2013 group of YAGM volunteers during a retreat at our home in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. When the YAGM volunteers later heard of the conversation, one of them lit up

with discovery and relief: "No wonder I can't discern my vocation. I'm in crisis mode!" If Lelwica is right in interpreting anxiety as a form of trauma—as a form of chronic and potentially debilitating crisis on a variety of levels (including physical, mental, emotional, relational)—then we can learn a good deal. In the words of psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk: "This [trauma] is about your body, your organism having been upset to interpret the world as a terrifying place. And yourself as being unsafe. And it has nothing to do with cognition" ("Restoring"). According to Babette Rothschild, symptoms include "chronic hyperarousal of the autonomic nervous system" (7). This translates to changes in heart rate, in cortisol, in digestion and elimination, in ability to downshift to calm one's mind and sleep. Maslow's hierarchy of needs comes to mind: we can't possibly discern core commitments, meaning, and purpose when dealing with (a lack of) foundational necessities. When basic needs such as safety and security are of immediate concern (whether actual or perceived or both), they eclipse the potential to engage in activities such as reflection and discernment.

For many on our campuses, vocation is about telling one's story—about authoring (or co-authoring) an account of oneself that is durable, purposeful, and empowering. That ability to find and tell the story of oneself is truncated or simply hijacked under duress. For someone with PTSD, for example, the traumatic event is not recalled or even remembered, and so cannot be retold. It is relived. And because of how the brain has processed (and not processed) the event, it is relived every time it reappears. What is more, reliving the traumatic event calls up the same psychophysical responses, which interrupt and disorient the person. There is no relief from understanding a moral or lesson or meaning of the life-story. Indeed, there is no story. There is only being plunged into the traumatic experience again and again.

While I'm not claiming that the anxiety of "average" college students registers at the level of PTSD, the problems for story-telling and vocation-finding are not dissimilar. Just last week, I was in the presence of a student heading into what became a full-blown anxiety episode. When the student later shared their story of that day, it appeared to me that anxiety served as the organizing principle. The ebb and flow of anxiety not only

shaped the story, it became the central character and strongly influenced the tone of the story. The story, in a sense, became anxiety's story and not the student's. Finally, when anxiety exerts such control on one's story, little space remains for consideration of other "characters," or what the Lutheran tradition calls one's neighbor. When one's own story is frequently hijacked by trauma or anxiety, little capacity exists to hear, let alone listen to the story of one's neighbor.

Acting in the Face of Anxiety

What can be done? Both Kolk and Rothschild point towards the efficacy of psychophysical approaches to healing trauma, including practices such as yoga and intentional breathing. I am most interested in their work because I want something I can choose and embody, something I can do in the face of anxiety. I imagine others would echo this desire. And this brings me to my concluding thoughts, thoughts about communal and individual action.

Dr. Lisa Sethre-Hofstad serves Concordia in the role of Vice President for Student Development and Campus Life. Days before writing this article, I listened as she shared statistics regarding levels and rates of anxiety on campus. The numbers surprised me as they were lower than I anticipated. I also hesitated because I heard in her interpretation of those numbers what I first took as minimizing the prevalence and intensity of anxiety among the student body. It seemed that she refuted anxiety as a problem. I've come to learn that what Dr. Sethre-Hofstad especially refutes is a *problem-centered* approach. She suggests, instead, that the college intentionally step into a radically different paradigm—one that emphasizes the *resourcefulness* of today's students for complex and successful lives. A sure way to increase a person's stress is to place the locus of control outside of that person.

During that same fall workshop, I led a breathing practice in which a proportionately longer exhale physiologically sends messages of safety to the body, uprooting anxiety and seeding presence, mindfulness, calming. Dr. Ernest Simmons (Concordia religion professor) shared with me that many in his department start classes with similar exercises. Students love it, he said, and then lamented that many confess it to be the quietest part of their day.

How do we as members of college communities create spaces and practices of grounding quiet, of calming, of psychophysical safety? How do we empower students to find their own grounding, calm, and safety in the midst of what appears to be incessantly fast-paced, highly-stimulated, and ever-shifting lives? How do we encourage and equip

"How do we empower students to find their own grounding, calm, and safety in the midst of what appears to be incessantly fast-paced, highly-stimulated, and ever-shifting lives? How do we encourage and equip students to claim what is within their control, including their very breath?"

students to claim what is within their control, including their very breath? How do we role model healthy ways of thinking, being, and doing—not only for their sakes but also for the common good?

When I returned to the United States from South Africa, I frequently thought of myself as having entered the Land of Anxiety. Now over a year and a half later, I have taken steps to travel elsewhere and am encouraged to continue this journey with this creative, insightful, and caring community.

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