

2022

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Madyson Ray (2022) "Why All This Talk About Vocation?," *Intersections*: Vol. 2022: No. 56, Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2022/iss56/11>

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Why All This Talk About Vocation?

Vocation is what my university's mission statement was based on and I did not even realize it until I attended the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education conference. Going into this conference, I was not quite sure what it was about, but the amount of knowledge I gained in the three day conference was mind-blowing. The conference name was Why All This Talk About Vocation and if I'm being honest, I was asking the same question. However, after being surrounded by educated, well-experienced, and deep-thinking individuals I learned that vocation is so much more than just a calling. Vocation is what gives education purpose. Vocation is what makes education not only about learning. Vocation is an intersection of where we are our best selves and where we do our best work. That is why as faculty, staff, and students within a university we must talk about vocation; it goes hand in hand with the material we are either teaching or receiving. Without understanding vocation and the embodiment of it, our education is almost meaningless. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to attend this conference as a student because it gave me a new perspective on Lutheran institutions and their missions. I gained an understanding of the meaning and use of vocation within the ELCA school's values, mission statements, and definitions of education.

This conference gave me valuable insight into what my college, Midland University, could benefit from. I attended four different workshops while at the conference and they were all so unique in the ideas and materials they shared. The first workshop was about teaching womanist thoughts at Lutheran Institutions. It was awesome to hear

the discussion in the room and how each institution does different activities to acknowledge women's contributions to society. Coming back to my university, I wanted to bring the idea of having a scavenger hunt around campus. At each location, there would be a QR code so students could learn about different women who have made contributions either to our university or community.

I also went to a workshop called Beyond the Playing Field. Midland University has a very large athlete population, so I could relate to the presentation very well. During the session, there was plenty of data that suggested a Player Development Coach would be highly beneficial to hire in order to increase retention rates and help athletes understand what life will look like after college. While Midland does have a student development staff member, it would be advantageous to invest in hiring someone who focuses directly on athletes.

There was a workshop that focused on the resistance behind saying the word vocation in our everyday vocabulary. I was immediately drawn to this workshop because I have rarely been exposed to the word 'vocation' and I wanted to know how to allow space for it to be recognized and responded to in an inclusive manner. However, what I enjoyed the most about this workshop and what I would bring back to my university was the video the presenters



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displayed. It went back to the basics and showed numerous interviews with people from around their campus and what vocation meant to them. At Midland we have an introductory course all freshmen are required to take and I believe making a video similar to the one in the presentation would help our students understand vocation from many different perspectives. Learning about vocation early on in higher education would help students understand why Lutheran education is set up the way it is so they can grow an appreciation for it.

Lastly, I learned about vocational programs across campus in the fourth workshop. This workshop caused a big shift in perspective for me because it was aimed at faculty and staff and different teaching techniques. I really enjoyed it, though, because I discovered how to do a vocational reflection. The professor would give a prompt and the students would take time to write, choose what they want to share, and feel comfortable sharing. The impact that reflection had on me in one workshop was amazing. I can't imagine the influence of doing a reflection for a whole semester. Vocational reflections are going to be implemented at Midland this semester. Also, the presenter talked about an elective they have on campus called Vocational Exploration where students can choose to take this cohort and they meet as a group for 2 hours every week. They do retreats, talk to other faculty members, write essays, create vision boards, and have guest speakers. I would bring this to my university as well

because it not only creates a good bond between students and faculty but also gives students the opportunity to learn about their personal vocations.

I was the only student to attend the conference this year and I believe this conference would benefit other students greatly. Not only would we be able to network with each other, but also with staff and faculty from other universities. After hearing the topic for next years conference, I think education students would get a lot out of it. One thing you might want to do before taking a student is have a pre-conference meeting where a professor goes over what the conference will be like, how to pick workshops that would benefit them the most, and some vocabulary that students might not understand. If the conference organizers made some workshops more student focused, it would be more advantageous to the students and the ideas they bring back to their institutions.

Midland University's mission statement is to inspire people to learn and lead in the world with purpose. After attending this year's Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education conference, the puzzle pieces connected for me, and that mission statement made perfect sense. At this conference, I was able to absorb information and conversations about vocations that will benefit me greatly as I continue my education. I'm beyond excited to bring back the ideas that were shared by the amazing speakers and execute them on campus.