



#### Related articles:

**Vocation: From worship to the world** (page 14)

**Religion and radio** (page 15)

**A hands-on approach to vocation** (page 17)

**Giving voice to the voiceless** (page 18)

**Psalmist or physicist?** (page 14)

*Living Lutheran*,  
May 2016

#### Contact us:

## LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631  
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540  
[lutheran@thelutheran.org](mailto:lutheran@thelutheran.org)  
[www.thelutheran.org](http://www.thelutheran.org)

*Living Lutheran* is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## Study guide:

# Vocation: From worship to the world

By Robert C. Blezard

Priesthood of all believers, ministry in daily life, spirituality in the workplace—no matter what you call it, vocation is something every follower of Jesus Christ encounters. What does it mean to you and for members of your congregation?

### Exercise 1: 24/7 Christians?

Many of us go to church every Sunday morning, as well as participate or assist in church functions and ministries. Is this enough, or merely a good start?

Answer for your congregation culture as a whole:

- How thoroughly do the teachings we hear and beliefs we profess on Sunday infuse and inform our actions for the other six days of the week, both in our family lives as well as interpersonal and professional relationships? Why? How do you know?
- What would our culture look like if our teachings and beliefs fully informed our lives the rest of the week? What would have to change? Why is change hard? What are some steps that could be taken?

Now answer the questions for yourself:

- How thoroughly do the teachings you hear and beliefs you profess on Sunday infuse and inform your actions for the other six days of the week? Why? How do you know?
- What would your life look like if the church's teachings and beliefs fully informed your life the rest of the week? What would have to change? Why is change hard? What are some steps to take?

### Exercise 2: Job description

- Do you have a job description for your employment? (Alternatively, does your church provide a job description for such positions as sexton, musician or pastor?) Why are job descriptions necessary for both employer and employee? Why don't we have one for being a disciple? Working together, come up with a job description for a follower of Jesus. Include a philosophical framework for the job, scope of work, specific duties and accountability (marks of success).



### Reprints:

Permission is granted for individuals, small groups and congregations to reproduce this study guide for local use.

### Tell us:

Do you find this guide helpful? Send comments and suggestions to [rcblezard@embarqmail.com](mailto:rcblezard@embarqmail.com)

### Contact us:

## LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631  
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540  
[lutheran@thelutheran.org](mailto:lutheran@thelutheran.org)  
[www.thelutheran.org](http://www.thelutheran.org)

*Living Lutheran* is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## Study guide: **Vocation**

*continued*

- What Scripture verses or Bible stories inspire and inform your work? How does your congregation support or equip followers for the tasks at hand? Would this serve as a vocational guide?

### Exercise 3: Faith vocation ‘on the job’

Would you agree that some secular careers seem more easily compatible with our Christian “job description” or vocation, such as nursing, teaching school or social work? Why is this so? Can you think of others? Can’t we always blend our Christian vocation and our secular careers?

Brainstorm ways that one could live out a Christian vocation with the following jobs: wait staff, lawyer, coffee-shop barista, accountant, janitor, state senator (or any elected official), retail clerk, police or corrections officer, mail carrier, taxi driver. Now discuss how you blend Christian vocation into your current job, and explore with your study group how you can do better.

### Exercise 4: Baptismal covenant

The prayer in the “Affirmation of Baptism” ritual (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 236, or Lutheran Book of Worship, page 201) outlines the vocation each of us has as baptized members of our church. Read it and discuss:

#### **To live among God’s faithful people.**

- Can this be mere passive association? What more is needed to fulfill this part of the covenant?
- Should not Christian lives in fellowship be mutually enriching, supportive, uplifting, defending, intertwined and dependent? How is that evidenced in your personal life and that of your congregation? What can you do better?
- How is “living among God’s faithful people” a part of our vocation?

#### **To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.**

- As tricky as it is to understand how a Christian proclaims the good news of God in Christ “in word,” how on earth does one do so “in deed”?
- What are the deeds you may do in and with your congregation?
- What deeds outside the church might obviously proclaim the good news (for instance, volunteering with Habitat for Humanity or a soup kitchen)?
- What about deeds in your everyday encounters with people—your co-workers, strangers you meet in a grocery store or your family?



### About the study guide author:



Rob Blezard is an assistant to the bishop in the Lower Susquehanna Synod. He holds degrees from Boston University School of Theology and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa).

### Contact us:

## LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631  
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540  
[lutheran@thelutheran.org](mailto:lutheran@thelutheran.org)  
[www.thelutheran.org](http://www.thelutheran.org)

*Living Lutheran* is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## Study guide: **Vocation**

*continued*

- How is “proclaiming the good news of God in Christ in word and deed” part of your faith vocation?

### **To serve all people, following the example of our Lord, Jesus.**

- What does it mean to serve *all* people? Even those we don't like? Who aren't part of our family or congregation?
- What does this imply about our relationship with *all* other people?
- What is the example of service that Jesus sets? What stories from the gospels inspire you or inform you about Jesus' service to *all* people? What does this have to do with your faith vocation?

### **And to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.**

- What is justice as the Bible teachings describe it?
- Hunger and poverty are two classic examples of injustice. What are others?
- What are the implications of striving for justice in “all the earth,” as opposed to only our own communities or countries?
- How do we strive for justice through our work in congregations? Through our own lives?
- What is peace? How do we “strive” for it? What are the implications of striving for peace in “all the earth,” as opposed to only our own communities or countries? How do we “strive” for peace through our church work? Through our lives? What does this have to do with vocation?

# Vocation: From worship to the world

**I**t was Monday morning after spring break. We were beginning a week of activities on campus designed to lift up the concept of vocation for students, faculty and staff. “It’s Celebrate Vocation Week,” I said to a man as he walked by, trying to get him to take a flier. He didn’t want to, but he stopped, took the flier and looked at me, puzzled: “I thought we had our vacation last week?”

*Vocation.* It’s a word capable of drawing puzzled looks. It’s also one of those words that—even when it’s not confused with *vacation*—means different things to different people.

For many, vocation means little more than a job. That’s why there are vocational schools where one learns a trade. For others, it’s a religious word most often associated with a call to full-time church work. For Lutherans, though, vocation is deeply embedded in our history and theology. It’s a foundational principle of the Reformation. Yet it still confuses people, and its promise remains largely unfulfilled.

Our vocational call to serve God in our everyday lives is embedded in our baptism, and in weekly worship we’re reminded again and again to live our faith in all we say and do.

Though many may experience a stubborn disconnect between faith and daily life, a solid understanding of vocation brings meaning and joy.

## Many names, one promise

Vocation has gone by many names. Martin Luther talked about the “universal priesthood,” which shortly thereafter morphed to the more familiar “priesthood of all believers.”

In the last century, during a revival of interest in the concept, people started talking about the

“ministry of the laity.” It didn’t take long before that phrase came to be associated with things laypeople do in and for the church (serving on committees, being a lay reader or visiting the sick). The phrase “ministry in daily life” was born.

Of late the word *ministry* has caused some to stumble because it sounds too churchy. So the language shifted to *calling* and *purpose*. Most recently people talk about vocation in terms of “spirituality in the workplace.”

While this shifting language might cause us to despair (what are we supposed to call it after all?) there is reason for hope: the promise of vocation just won’t let us go. History shows that we keep coming back to the potential for connecting faith and life—each time as if we’re discovering it anew—precisely because it holds so much promise.

Vocation is on our lips and in our heart, but our practices and priorities often betray us. We see the call to connect faith and life as being critical to our purpose, but we keep short-circuiting this connection with a persistent focus on what we do as the gathered church.

## Tracing the mystery

Not long ago I brought pastors together to discuss vocation. Hoping for a handful to respond, I was overwhelmed when more than 100 showed up.

The pastors said they yearned to put ministry in daily life (vocation) at the center of their ministries, but either they didn’t know how to do this or were aware of congregational dynamics that would resist any effort to turn attention outward. On top of that, there was considerable confusion about “ministry,” what it is and who does it. They were intensely interested in the topic but unsure about how to shape their congregations around it.

After more than a year of discussions with pastors, I engaged laypeople in the conversations. Surprisingly, these conversations showed that laypeople don’t limit ministry to what happens in church. They clearly affirmed their baptismal vocations, but they also expressed a need to be better supported in their various ministries in life. Far from limiting ministry to what pastors do,

# Religion and radio

Jason DeRose has known he wanted to be a journalist since the sixth grade, so he was as surprised as anyone to find himself at the University of Chicago earning a Master of Divinity degree.

He managed to combine his passions into one vocation by reporting on religion instead of preaching it. Now the western bureau chief for National Public Radio, he has been covering and reporting on religious issues for much of his post-graduate career.

“I accidentally ended up in divinity school,” said DeRose, a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Santa Monica, Calif. “I didn’t know what to do after college and a professor suggested it.”

By the time he went to graduate school, DeRose already was a veteran reporter. His first job was as a youth writing about his middle school for a small newspaper. He chose St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., in large part because it had a public radio station on campus.

After he received his master’s, everything started to fall into place. After freelancing in Chicago and working for about a year in Seattle, DeRose was back in Chicago covering religion full time on radio—just when the clergy sex abuse story became huge (2002).

In his present position DeRose has edited stories of all kinds, including NPR religion stories.

DeRose said his faith doesn’t conflict with his job, though he admitted he may be slightly harder on ELCA stories because he may know the background and key players from a life in the church.

“The only time I’ve felt conflicted is when I knew someone affected by the story,” said DeRose, who recalled the ELCA going through the decision of whether to ordain openly gay and lesbian pastors. “We don’t ask reporters not to be human beings. Our job is to do our jobs well and to be fair to various sides to a story.”

Most of the stories he covers are about the broad spectrum of religion in public life. Recent story topics included looking at the faith life of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

For DeRose, the intersection of faith and vocation is not in what your job is, but how your job can serve your neighbors.

He likes a quote from Martin Luther: “The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.”

“With my job, I don’t think my faith makes me do X, Y or Z,” DeRose said. “I think it’s more about serving your neighbors by doing your job well.”

**Jeff Favre** is an assistant professor of Pierce College in Los Angeles.

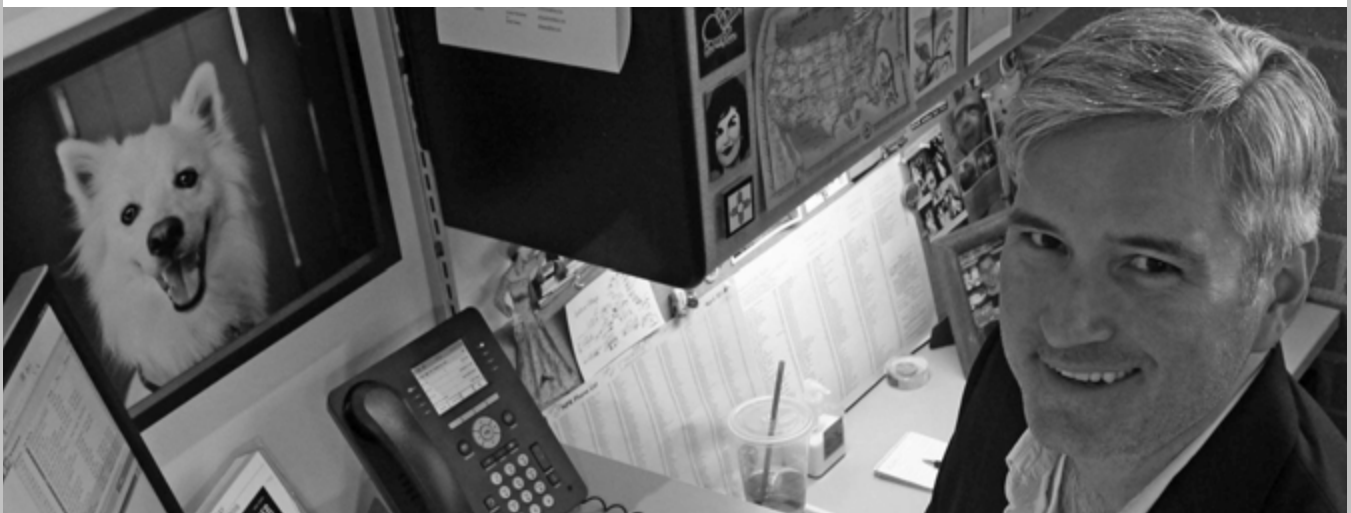


Photo courtesy of Jason DeRose

one participant observed, “We can reach people whom the clergy cannot.”

One thing became clear over time—we know we’re called to ministry in daily life because we hear it all the time in worship.

- Listen to this post-communion prayer: “Renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, *for the sake of a world in need.*”
- Hear the Affirmation of Baptism: “Serve all people, following the example of Jesus.”
- Sing this hymn: “Will you use the faith you’ve found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 798).
- Ponder this gospel reading: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (Luke 10:36).
- Be sent with some version of “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

Next time you worship, pay attention to the words you hear, speak, sing and pray. You will likely find references like the ones above that call us to connect our faith with all that we say and do, not just in the church but in the world.

### Moving forward

Good news: we know we’re called to various vocations in the world, and we’re already engaged in ministry in countless places, relationships and responsibilities.

Even better news: people are increasingly hungry to make connections between faith and daily life. Just look at the number of books and blogs devoted to finding meaning and purpose. We *want* to live up to the baptismal promise of vocation.

Tom Nelson, author of *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Crossway, 2011) is successfully addressing vocation in his congregation. Members respond with profound gratitude when the connection between faith and daily life is made: “Pastor, I have always felt like a second-class citizen before” or “Pastor, thanks for telling me my work matters.”

Making the connection between faith and life brings us new meaning and joy.

What would it mean to shape our congregations around vocation? Making this shift is easier than one might think. It begins with acknowledging, affirming and supporting what we’re already doing in the roles and responsibilities of our everyday lives.

This work deepens when we change our way of thinking: instead of seeing ministry as something


that only happens in and through the church, we start talking about and supporting ministry taking place in our everyday lives. It may be as simple as responding differently to someone who can’t participate in a congregational activity because of responsibilities with work or family by saying, “That’s your ministry right now. How can we help you do it better?”

We can become bolder in this work of reimagining our congregations by revisiting the language we use in worship and translating our generic and lofty words and phrases into concrete realities. A recent prayer petition was: “Make your church a prophetic voice for the voiceless, a bold witness of love to the neighbor and a force for hope in all the world.”

But the church isn’t just an institution, it is the people. If people can’t see themselves in that petition (leaving that “voice” to someone else) perhaps they would see themselves in this one: “Make us all prophetic voices, bold witnesses and a force for hope in our homes and neighborhoods, in our work and our community involvement.”

Preaching and teaching plays a vital role in making the connection even more specific, so we see our lives, relationships, work and passions all as part of God’s desire to bring about a new heaven and a new earth.

We get a good start when we pray for people in our congregations (and beyond) who are involved in agriculture, naming that they’re fulfilling Scripture’s call to “feed the hungry.” We do this when we train people in legal and judicial roles so they can speak (yes, testify!) in our congregations about their efforts to “strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” We can create a means to check in on Sundays to see how our various ministries went during the week. Doing so puts delicious meat on the bones of the prior week’s “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we would do well to lift up and celebrate the vocation of the baptized in all our congregations. Making vocation—that connection between faith and life—the core of our life together renews the faith and hope of all members, revitalizes congregations and shines the light of God’s love on a hurting world. 



DuBois, an ELCA pastor and instructor at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, is author of *The Scattering: Imagining a Church that Connects Faith and Life* (Wipf & Stock, 2015).



Photo: Julie Louisa Hagenbuch

## A hands-on approach to vocation

Frances Blatchley remembers as a child pretending she was a nurse. “It was all I ever wanted to be from the time I was little,” she said. “My poor mother put up with a lot of cold cloths on her forehead.”

Little hands that ministered to a patient mother grew into the hands of a student at the Lankenau Hospital School of Nursing in Philadelphia. There, from Lutheran deaconesses, Blatchley first learned about Martin Luther’s concept of vocation.

“I don’t think I’m much different from hundreds and hundreds of other nurses. If you don’t have the calling, I don’t know how you do the things that nurses do. You have to have compassion,” she said.

Compassion and faith have guided Blatchley for more than 50 years as an obstetrics and recovery room nurse. Recently retired, she volunteers weekly at Evangelical Community Hospital in Lewisburg, Pa.

Blatchley says hand-holding is her best skill. “I’m not eloquent like some people when it comes to prayer,” she said, “but I’ve often held patients’ hands and prayed with them.”

She understands the profound power of touch to bring hope to a mother able to hold her child before the newborn is whisked away to neonatal intensive care, or to reassure patients in post-op recovery. She knows firsthand how touch can comfort parents grieving a stillborn child or patients receiving a difficult diagnosis. Her experience as a 28-year breast cancer survivor has also shaped her faith and ability to minister to other women facing cancer surgery and treatment.

“As a nurse I’ve shared the joy of birth and had the privilege of being present at the passing on to eternity,” she said. “Maybe it sounds cliché, but this truly is ‘God’s work. Our hands.’”

Blatchley’s faith is “hands-on” too. She and her husband, Ronald, serve Messiah Lutheran Church in New Berlin, Pa. From altar guild to choir to serving on the congregation council to visiting homebound members, the Blatchleys are ready to lend a hand. “If doors need to be opened, we can be there,” she said.

**Sharron Blezard** is communications specialist for the Lower Susquehanna Synod.

## Giving voice to the voiceless

Julinda Sipayung has made it her life's work to counsel, educate and empower Indonesian women who are victims of domestic violence to speak up and speak out.

A Lutheran pastor and coordinator of the Sopou Damei (harmony place) Women's Crisis Center in Pematangsiantar, she believes that "when we support women, we can break the cycle of poverty and violence."

The center, which is supported by the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church, is a resource for women and children who fall victim to violence in the largely patriarchal and Muslim-majority country. Domestic violence is a pervasive problem in Indonesia, Sipayung said. Most of the cases she sees are Muslim women, and "their religion allows men to commit violence."

Since Sopou Damei is a ministry of the church, Sipayung often begins conversations with women by asking for their permission to pray together. "Sometimes we quote the Bible. It's part of our mission to share the good news," she said. "I think we give them hope, with the Holy Spirit."

Prior to becoming coordinator, Sipayung served 15 years as a parish pastor. She said her current role is fulfilling because she works

to address a critical issue in Indonesia—and around the world. "From birth in this world, many women become victims of violence. When you become a victim of domestic violence—physical, emotional, economic, sexual—you can't talk to anyone," she said. "My work is to educate women on gender equality and human rights and encourage them to speak up. When you speak up another woman could be saved."

In March she joined an ELCA delegation that attended the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women. Building relationships with women from other Lutheran churches was inspiring and eye-opening, she said.

Sipayung has been married for 13 years, but she and her husband have not yet been able to have a child. This has placed an additional burden and social stress on the couple because of Indonesian cultural norms.

"But it is nothing if I compare it to other women's struggles," she said. "I think, maybe God's using me, my struggle, to help others. I look at these women, at least I know how they feel, how they struggle. A wounded healer has the capacity to heal others' wounds."

**Erin Strybis** is an associate editor of *Living Lutheran*.



Photo: ELCA staff





Photo: Ocken Photography

## Psalmist or physicist?

You could consider Steve Nahn a modern-day psalmist. David, the writer of Psalm 8, pondered with wonder: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established ....”

But psalmist isn’t the title on Nahn’s business card. His day job is exploring the origins of the universe and what it’s made of. Nahn is a scientist at Fermilab (Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory), a U.S. government facility outside Chicago specializing in high-energy particle physics.

As part of his job, Nahn visits CERN every six to eight weeks. CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, is a similar research facility outside Geneva. There he works on the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), an enormous instrument used to find and study the fundamental building blocks of all matter.

“Essentially the goals of my research benefit everybody in that we publish papers that try to further elucidate how nature works,” Nahn said.

“A long time ago, I learned the scientific method, which was that a theory is not valid if you cannot conceive of a way to disprove it. That is basically how I separate faith and science—science is that which can be proven, and faith is

just what you believe, no proof required. Some people find this dissatisfying, but it works for me.

“I suppose there is some harmony with religion and the Uncertainty Principle, which essentially says you cannot have perfect, exact knowledge, but I don’t usually dwell on it.”

While at home in Batavia, Ill., his family attends (coincidentally) Geneva (Ill.) Lutheran Church, and while in Geneva, Switzerland, he enjoys being part of the English-speaking congregation of the Lutheran church there.

And what does he think of the “God particle,” which was an anticipated discovery of the LHC for many years before a 2012 breakthrough confirmed that the Higgs boson did, in fact, exist?

“[Calling it the ‘God particle’] mostly just confuses science and religion where there’s no good reason for it, except perhaps to sell books,” he said. “Hopefully the LHC opens the door to many more questions than it answers, and I don’t see it posing a threat to my beliefs or anyone else’s, for that matter, any more than the discovery of atoms, protons and electrons did.”

**Stephen Padre** is managing editor, *Bread for the World*, Washington, D.C.

---

The Life of Faith Initiative ([Lifeoffaith.info](http://Lifeoffaith.info)) is an emerging grassroots effort in the ELCA whose purpose it is to “stir up a culture change that frees us to make the service by the baptized in the arenas of daily life the central focus of the church’s mission.”