

LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



The Vocation of a Christian

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2026



The Vocation of a Christian

Do you look upon your many vocations in this life as gifts from God? You should. They are certainly personal gifts to you that give you purpose and feelings of fulfillment.

However, your vocations are especially a gift from God to your many neighbors. Think of it, whether you are a spouse, parent, child, coworker, employer, butcher, baker, or candlestick maker, you are called by God in those stations in life to serve others He places around you. Whether in your vocations you use a hammer, a computer, an oven, a gun, a stethoscope, a chalkboard, a broom - it is God who is behind those implements providing shelter, necessary information, food, protection, healing, instruction, and comfort for your neighbors, known and unknown.

Our Creator God not only gave Adam and Eve food; He also provided them with work. They were partners with God to care for His creation. Their work was their calling, their vocation in the perfect world. But even after the rebellion against the Creator, God did not set aside His gift of vocation. It is true that after sin entered the world, vocation often meant that work became difficult. Yet God provided for His creation through these vocations. Man may pursue his selfish purposes in his work, but God in the end will always prevail even if His vocations are misused by us in our sin.

The sinner's motive for his good work is not to serve, but to focus on himself and build himself up in the eyes of others and God. The sinful man is always aspiring to rise out of lowliness to the heights of earthly glory and follows his evil desire to get away from serving. Through the very action of striving toward honor and recognition, he separates himself from God, who Himself has bent down to us in great service.

But God gives us our stations in life to serve. To use our stations for our selfish purposes is to forsake neighbor and step out of what the Lord has called us to do

Just as it was in Eden, so it is with us who have been newly created by water and the Spirit. We have been recreated spiritually, so that in our everyday lives we might fulfill our vocations in love to our neighbor. We can see how the perfect Christ had His own vocations in this life (son, friend, carpenter, Rabbi, shepherd) and fulfilled them in perfect righteousness. This gives us hope even after reviewing our many sins committed in our vocations. Jesus, who was perfect, sacrificed that holy vocational life for all our sins committed daily in our own vocations. In addition, through faith, He dresses us in His white robe of vocational holiness.

Thus, serving is no longer a burden. It has been lifted from us by the sacrifice of Christ for all our sins. We have been set free to serve in joy and peace.

Looking forward to eternal life in heaven, rejoice that there will still be vocations in service to God and our brothers and sisters. There will no longer be a curse upon our vocations as we reign with Him forever. No longer will we misuse what our Lord gives us to do, nor when rendered selflessly will it be abused by those whom we serve. This is life to its fullest for which Jesus gave His life as our Redeemer.

Give thanks to our Lord for the gift of vocation. With grateful joy, fulfill your callings now as you love your neighbor as you love yourself. In your gratefulness for your neighbors' service to you in their own vocations, praise the Giver of all good gifts from the beginning of time to life everlasting.

For further reading on the doctrine of vocation:

Luther on Vocation, by Gustaf Wingren, reprinted by Ballast Press: Evansville, IN, 1994.

God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life, by Gene E. Veith, Jr., Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL, 2002.

Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness, by Harold Senkbeil, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, MO, 1994, especially pp. 161-177.

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Question ...

Recently I've been giving more thought to following a different career path. The prospect of making a change intrigues me, but I also want to make sure that I'm doing the right thing. My occupation is my vocation, a calling from God.

If I change jobs and careers, will I be turning my back on a calling from God?

Answer:

People change jobs and careers more often than we think. A Harris poll from 2021 determined that over half of U.S. workers considered a job change that year. Employees in transition will often report dissatisfaction with their job or cite the desire for better benefits. Sadly, almost no one mentions a concern for doing God's will. Still, the Word of God has much to say about work and our current situation in life.

In the home, at work, at church, and with respect to the government, the Lord has given each of us our vocations, our daily callings in life. In Scripture, the apostle Paul directed each believer in Corinth to "live in the situation the Lord assigned to him—the situation he was in when God called him to faith" (1 Cor 7:17 EHV). Paul then says, "Let each person stay in that calling in which he was called" (1 Cor 7:17, 20 EHV). Rather than calling them out of the world, the Lord calls Christians to live where He has placed them, and to serve Him through their service to their neighbor.

So, we don't choose our vocations; God does. As our skills and abilities, our talents and inclinations come from Him, the Lord also establishes our relationships with other people, accomplishing His will through—and even in spite of—our daily choices.

We turn our backs on God when we regard our occupation only as a matter of personal choice. Instead of trusting in the Lord, we look to our own practical wisdom and understanding. We also sin when we covet the vocations of our neighbor, looking down on our own occupation and imagining that the "grass is greener on the other side." As a result, people wind up making career decisions based solely on things like "which job pays the most" rather than considering how to best use what God has given them. When these sinful motives are at play, a person's decision to change jobs—or even to remain in the same job—would not be pleasing to God.

Still, a vocation does not have to be permanent. In 1 Corinthians 7, as Paul directed the believers in Corinth to continue faithfully in their various callings, he acknowledged

that a change in the circumstances of life could be a good thing. Paul wrote: "Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it bother you. But if you are able to become free, take advantage of it. For the slave who was called to be in the Lord is the Lord's freed person. Likewise, the free person who was called is Christ's slave" (1 Cor 7:21-22). Christian slaves could continue to serve their masters in good conscience. However, if some could gain their freedom, they should do so, not to their own benefit, but to more effectively serve Christ.

In our own lives, the Lord may present opportunities that enable us to serve Him in new ways, allowing us to discover a previously unknown talent or sending someone our way with a job offer. So, how does one make a God-pleasing choice when the opportunity arises? Pray for wisdom and ask how the Lord can use us to hallow His name and make His kingdom come. Since God works through our vocations to serve the needs of our neighbor, ask yourself, "Which job or career puts my talents, experience, and inclinations to their best use in service to my neighbor?"

In the end, "Whatever you do, keep working at it with all your heart, as for the Lord and not for people, because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (Col 3:23-24). As you face changes in your daily callings, stay focused on your highest calling as children of God in Christ, and on the eternal inheritance awaiting us. Make decisions, not only based on what will be best for you now, but looking forward to the best that God has in store for all of His people in life everlasting.



Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?

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Bus Driver **for God's Glory**

by **PASTOR TIMOTHY BUELOW**, Contributing Writer
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When we think of “vocation,” our minds often drift to the pulpit, the teacher’s desk, or the missionary’s distant post. Yet, for Christians, God’s calling is woven into the ordinary rhythms of daily life—a truth I was reminded of through the example of my wife’s farfar (paternal grandfather), **Erland Pettersson**. Back when it was illegal to be a Lutheran in Sweden without being a member of the Swedish State Church, sincere Lutherans gathered in private homes and “mission houses” for devotional readings from Luther’s postils. Erland led such a group—even built a mission house. Later, when it became legal to form a Lutheran Confessional Church (LBK), Erland was ordained to pastor his group and offer them communion. But when his life drew to a close, it was his work as a city bus driver many remembered about him.

A Humble Title, A Profound Calling

Imagine a man, known for his deep devotion, his spiritual leadership, and his love for the teachings of Luther, comfortable being known by the simple,

unadorned title—bus driver. It’s tempting to assume that Erland’s only memorable legacy would be his volunteer work in spiritual circles, yet he left the world remembering his “ordinary” profession. This, I believe, reveals something profound about the Lutheran understanding of vocation.

Luther’s Vision of Vocation

Martin Luther taught that all honest work, done in faith and for the good of neighbor, is service to God. “The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks,” he wrote. For Luther, vocation was not confined to the sacred or spectacular, but hallowed the commonplace, and dignified the daily grind.

The Bus Driver’s Pulpit

For Erland, driving a bus was more than a job—it was his mission field, his daily opportunity to exercise patience, kindness, and integrity. Every route

was a chance to serve others, to offer a listening ear or a word of encouragement, and to bear witness to Christ in subtle but profound ways. His vocation behind the wheel was as much an offering to God as his leadership as a “Lutherläsare,” as the Luther-reading group leaders were known.

The Glory of Everyday Work

Erland’s story invites us to reconsider the meaning of vocation in our own lives. Whether we are teachers, parents, mechanics, or students, our daily work matters to God. We are called to do all things “as unto the Lord” (Col 3:23), not because the work is always glamorous, but because God is present in the ordinary. To be a bus driver, a nurse, or an accountant for God’s glory is to recognize that no task is too menial to be infused with divine purpose. And God has accomplished just that infusion. We are all His royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9,12).

A Legacy Etched in Stone

Perhaps that’s why Swedes traditionally inscribed their ordinary professions onto their tombstones. We see “Pastor” (Kyrkoherde), “Father,” and “Mother” on their stones as we do here, but also Trädgårdsmästare (Professional gardener), Banmästare (Rail inspection supervisor), Rödakors syster (Red Cross nurse) and even Busschaufför (Bus driver).

Next time you pass a city bus, think of Erland Pettersson. Remember that faithfulness in the small things is often the truest measure of greatness in God’s eyes. These vocations, carved in stone, are a testament to the sacredness of all honest labor done for God’s glory. May we, too, embrace the callings placed before us—however ordinary they may seem—with gratitude, integrity, and joy. In God’s kingdom, every faithful bus driver, teacher, parent, and friend is called to be a vessel of His grace.



Agda and Erland Pettersson’s gravestone behind St. Johannes Church in Norrköping, Sweden



Agda and Erland Pettersson



Sara’s maternal great grandfather “Rail Master” and grandfather “Pastor”:



Other gravestones behind St. Johannes Church in Norrköping, Sweden:





Education Shaping the Vocation of a Stay-at-Home Mother

by **MRS. EMELINE GULLIXSON**, Contributing Writer,
Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minn.

Unlike many in the public discourse, Lutherans don't take issue with the idea that the God-given vocations of wife and mother ought to be prioritized. Hardly any confessional Lutheran would raise their eyebrows at a new mother choosing to stay at home to raise her own children, temporarily or permanently stepping out of the workforce. Stay-at-home motherhood is a calling from God in service to some of our littlest neighbors, and we rightly see that choice as one that should be commended and supported.

What may not always be supported, though, is the value of a woman earning a college degree only to choose to stay at home with her children. Staying home may still be seen as a worthy decision, but it's hard not to consider—why pay the tuition and spend four years in school only to not use your degree in the traditional sense?

I attended college at Bethany Lutheran knowing that after graduation, I first and foremost wanted to be a wife and mom. God blessed me with those vocations, and though I'm not the breadwinner of our family, I'm still glad that I got my degree. I'm not unique in making that decision as a stay-at-home mother, either. Many women choose to do exactly that,

and find that their education is a blessing to their families, though perhaps in less obvious, immediately tangible ways.

For Kristin Faugstad, a stay-at-home mother of seven, this conversation was one she had considered since before she attended college at Bethany, and is now considering with her own children.

"Education was always encouraged in our household," said Faugstad, who earned her bachelor's degree in Music. "College was an obvious pathway, but even if us girls would have a job someday, if we also had a family, our family was our primary vocation. My parents instilled in us that there's value in education even if it doesn't result in a career."

The vocation of a stay-at-home mother encompasses various roles at various ages and stages. But ultimately, from a Christian perspective, a stay-at-home mother raises and nurtures her children to know Christ as their Savior and to love and serve their neighbors. On the surface, a woman receiving her college degree only to spend her days changing diapers, making meals, and correcting toddlers doesn't seem like a logical path.

"Sometimes it's drudgery. It's very rewarding, but it's also a slog, and can be monotonous and draining," said Jenna Thompson, a mother of six and grandmother to 19. She acknowledged what a blessing it was to have raised her children at home, but hesitated to paint the vocation in a completely rosy, idyllic way, forgetting its hardships.

"Looking ahead to college, I always did know I wanted to become a stay-at-home mom... but I knew that there was a purpose for education for its own sake." Thompson got her associate's degree at Bethany when it was a two year program, and was pursuing further education when she began dating and then married her husband, a widower. She adopted his two children, and was immediately thrust into the role of a stay-at-home mother. Throughout those decades of raising children at home, she at times homeschooled, took on occasional part-time work, and supported her pastor husband. Now, working full-time again as the Fine Arts Coordinator at Bethany and relishing life as a mom and grandma of many, she added that she sees more value in her Bethany education now than she did when she was in the classroom.

"In those years of child-raising that are all-consuming and take a lot of your time and energy, it [education] gives you a place to go that reminds you who you are," said Thompson, who described her college education as a rich foundation for whatever vocation a person might have—not necessarily preparing for a specific job, but ensuring the formation of a person. And not just the classes, but the professors, peers, and Lutheran, liberal arts environment as a whole pointed to a different, more holistic end goal of education. "It was implicit that what you're learning in the classroom is going to apply in all facets of your life, and it's going to expand your soul."

A mother's education isn't wasted if she is the primary caretaker in her children's lives, shaping them with nourishing ideas and values. Though she may not be earning money, time spent at home with her children is one of the most valuable gifts she can give them. Education enhances a person's life no matter their vocation, and a well-rounded, educated mother is only going to benefit her children. This isn't to say that getting a college degree is the "correct" path to becoming a stay-at-home mother, but for those that choose that path, it is certainly not a wasted pursuit.

"The knowledge and training and thinking that you receive from an institution is applicable in all areas of life. It's applicable to when you're changing your toddler's diaper and you turn on the news and you're thinking through whatever's happening in the world, or when you sit through a sermon on a Sunday morning," said Thompson. "To be educated well helps us in every single vocation, whether it's one that we get paid for, or one that we get called to by God."

And, whether mothers choose to homeschool or send their children to a brick-and-mortar school, they are always teaching their children, whether formally or informally. They teach the faith, habits, love of learning, and how to live in the world. Earning a degree isn't the only way to pass these values down, but a good education can only help in that regard. It's also a way for moms to share their own talents and interests with their children.

"I think it's valuable to have a plan in place, but to recognize that your worth as a person is not tied to whether or not you use your degree," noted Faugstad. "You have a whole lot more personhood than the diploma that you hold."

Though raising toddlers isn't likely to bring daily, stimulating conversation, both Faugstad and Thompson emphasized how their educations have shaped their lives and interactions with their older children.

"In any [college] major a mother has, she's going to bring her love and interest in that area to her kids. We all have our little things that we love and can talk about, and our kids pick up on those interests of ours, and I think it's important for our kids to see that we have interests, are well-rounded people, and like to learn," said Faugstad, who currently homeschools her children. "As I've grown into having older kids, that's been a fun thing to share interests with them on a higher level, and to not feel like my interests were just an escape from motherhood, but that it can all be incorporated into the same fabric of life."

With each mother's specific interests, talents, and gifts God has given them, she nourishes her children's minds and bodies—always pointing them to the One Thing Needful.

"I think the greatest benefit that a specifically Lutheran, liberal arts education gave me was a stronger, confessionally Lutheran worldview," said Faugstad. "I was steeped in the music of the church and the theology of Lutheranism, and that obviously flavors how I parent."

This is the ultimate "end" of a good education: one that equips students to confess their Christian faith. "In my vocation as a parent, having a strong foundation in what I believe and why, and being able to talk about that easily with my kids is so valuable. The most important thing as a parent is to pass on the faith to the next generation... my Bethany education was a great blessing in that regard," said Faugstad.

To love and serve one's neighbor—in this case, a mother serving her children—is to shape them into more whole people who know and confess Christ as their Savior. Far from being useless, a good education allows stay-at-home mothers to serve their children in rich, varied ways. For countless mothers, their education plays a valuable role in this vocation, which can certainly not be called wasted.



The **Vocation** of a Christian

Men Wanted:

**The Calling to Manhood
in the Kingdom of God**

by **PASTOR PATRICK ERNST**, Contributing Writer
Eagle Lake Lutheran Church, Eagle Lake, Minn.

“Chauvinism.” “Misogyny.” “Toxic masculinity.” Words abound in our public discourse for the excesses of men. Certainly, men who perpetrate sexual harassment or abuse should be held accountable. Those who engage in racism and target innocent people need themselves to be targeted by the law. But one could listen to the voices in our culture and get the sense that manliness is not a powerful tool for good or ill, but a flaw. One could get the impression that men are a wanted group, hunted down in order to be re-trained or pushed out of public life.

Biblical Christians are opposed to throwing out men with the mucky water they sometimes create. In fact, it’s a fool’s errand to try. You can disenfranchise them; you can demoralize them; but you can’t make them disappear or change the way God programs them to work. If you try, these men retreat into their parents’ basements or digital worlds and spend their energy in futile, if not destructive, goals. Mass shootings are a male-dominated cancer of our society. This violence is not a sign of men being men. It’s a sign of disordered manhood shoved out of respectable society into the dark corners of mental illness and online fringe movements. Men are 2–3 times more likely to die of drug overdose than women and four times more likely to die by suicide. I suppose, in light of those statistics, you could say the people trying to get rid of men are doing a good job, after all.

In the ELS, men are wanted, and not to be rehabilitated into something else. Men are wanted because we are a Lutheran church that follows the God-Man, Christ. Jesus roundly condemns the sins particularly tempting to men. He called both the roughnecks and white-collar elites of his time to repentance. We do the same. There has been no stronger critique of men’s abuses than Christianity, and there have never been societies with greater dignity for all than where most men feared God. Jesus did not call men to renounce their strength or skills or competitive drive – He called them to bend those powers to the purposes of the Kingdom. Think of Joshua, whose tactical prowess

God used to conquer Canaan (Josh 1:9); David, whose military victories were matched with fair governance (2 Sam 8:14–15); Peter and his boldness (Matt 16:13–19); Paul and his ambitious drive (Acts 9:1–22). Christ calls men wallowing in sin and purposelessness today to do the same. This is not a diagnostic rant. We’re not interested in victimhood here. We’re interested in manhood renewed by Christ that persists in doing good, despite the headwinds (Rom 12:21).

To critics: Does anyone really want men excluded from public realms? Do we really want them addicted to porn and video games, selfish and unmotivated to pursue meaningful connections? Well, that’s what we have. The experiment of feminizing men, including in the church, and shaming the rest has failed. Men, you may be labeled and accused of all kinds of deviancies, but you are wanted by the church because of the qualities God Himself gave you. God used the male flesh of his incarnate Son to bear our sins away from us, and He’ll use you, too. Get to a divine service. Submit to the spiritual oversight of your pastor. Create more than you consume to support more than yourself (1 Tim 5:8). Respect women. Marry one. Bring her to church. Have a family. Bring them, too. “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Pet 2:17).

The world needs men, and it’s self-sabotage when a people no longer wants them. We, on the other hand, are perfectly poised to integrate them. We maintain unequivocally a Christ-patterned male clergy and clear understanding of gender roles in the church. Women, this is not to downgrade your place in the church in the least. In fact, you can answer for me:

What kind of men do you want to see in family, church, and society? Isn’t it the godly, selfless ones following Jesus? If “Happy wife, happy life” goes so far in a marriage, church councils across the ELS should be chanting, “Get the men; grow again.”

Christian Love is Tied to Truth

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THE CENTER FOR
APOLOGETICS
AND
WORLDVIEWS

Presenting Evidence
Critiquing Worldviews
Fortifying Believers
Engaging Unbelievers

In this post-Christian and challenging culture where God's truth is obscured, how to love our neighbor can be confusing. Add to this that the whole concept of truth is often rejected, making it even more difficult. But truth remains essential in helping the Christian know how to love. So here are ten principles to bring with us into a world in desperate need of Christian love and truth.

- 1 Transcendent truths really exist that apply to all people of all time.** We often refer to these as absolute or objective truths. They are established by the almighty and eternal Creator for all people, even though many consider them dated or ridiculous.
- 2 God wants all men to abide by His truths for they are grounded in His love.** To say that certain truths do not apply to certain people or that certain people should be affirmed in what is contrary to God's truth may steer them away from His loving will for them.
- 3 Christians are to stand firm on God's truths ("Here I stand," said Luther).** If we waver, we may miss a chance to more fully love our neighbor. This does not mean we must be vocal; silence is a very legitimate option. But there may be times when a confession of a truth is necessary, for silence may be understood as affirming a lie. Christians are not to believe in or live by a lie or give the impression that it is okay for others to live by or believe in a lie.
- 4 Man is unique in that he alone is created in the image of God and therefore has sacred value; not just some people or not just Christians, but everyone has this image of God regardless of what he believes or how he lives.** The non-Christian has this sacred value no less than us. This is how we are to view each and every neighbor.
- 5 Man is fallen.** Humans have lost the most important aspect of the image of God – holiness, righteousness, sinlessness. Because of this, many of God's truths can or will be rejected and ignored. We should, therefore, not be surprised when our unbelieving neighbor (or even our fellow Christian) believes things or lives in ways contrary to God's truths, including obvious truths. This fallenness applies to Christians as well – by nature we are no less fallen, making us equally deserving of hell.
- 6 When opportunities arise, we Christians are to love our neighbors with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), unconditionally and sacrificially.** Christ is our example.
- 7 We must be aware that the world, our flesh, and Satan will pressure us to not love our neighbor as we should, including the temptation to put aside certain truths made unpopular by culture.** To put it another way, we will be pressured to fear, love, and trust in something or someone else more than the Creator and Redeemer who has given us His truths.
- 8 Many will be offended by truths we confess.** Being offended may indicate we have been unloving. But the opposite may be true: it may mean we have loved because we have stood on the truth, confessed the truth, and lived by the truth with the hope that others will abide by the truth (see Mark 10:17-21 where the love of Christ is clearly tied to a truth – a harsh truth – that a man needed to hear but who walked away offended).
- 9 Christ died for all. Not just for Christians.** Therefore, and above all, we are to desire the salvation of our neighbor. As God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, so should we. But we can hinder this if we ignore or downplay certain truths, including those truths that a person, whom God has placed in our lives, is denying or struggling with.
- 10 As we fall short and repent, we rest in the complete, unconditional, undeserved forgiveness of our sins provided by God's great love for us, established in the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross for us, and graciously distributed to us by the Holy Spirit in word and sacrament.**



Be the Body

by **PASTOR PATRICK ERNST**, Contributing Writer
Eagle Lake Lutheran Church, Eagle Lake, Minn.

Sometimes, sin comes from spiritually forgetting that we are our bodies. When we sin, we're acting as if our bodies don't matter – we can do immoral things which don't have an impact on our standing with God.

Our faith proclaims the opposite: you are one person, body and soul. Adam was created from the ground and God breathed life into him (Gen 2:7). When Adam and Eve committed the first sin, it was both a soul and body problem: the soul stopped fearing, loving, and trusting God above all things, the hand picked, and the mouth ate. God promised a Savior in the flesh, which would be necessary to rescue humanity (Gen 3:15).

As promised, God became man. It was Jesus' human life in the body that produced the righteousness we need before God. No spirit could suffer for our sins; Jesus did so by having His human flesh brutalized, nailed to a cross, and laid in a tomb. His bodily resurrection promises a new, future, glorious, created life for those who are connected to Christ.

When we are brought into the church, our bodies are involved as much as our minds and hearts. We may come to faith by hearing the Word of God with our ears, proclaimed by another human. Many of us are brought to faith by baptism, which applies water to the body for the cleansing of the conscience. We are claimed, body and soul, for the kingdom of God. We experience strength to use our bodies for good when we receive the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. And we are not called to serve abstract people. God has not commanded you to honor all parents, but your flesh and blood parents. He has not called you to be faithful

to all spouses, but your flesh and blood spouse. He has not called you to live in harmony with "Christians" as an abstract concept, but with the flesh and blood people who stand next to you and confess their sins, who kneel next to you and receive the same bread and wine, the same body and blood of Christ. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17).

The body that has been united to Christ is not at sin's disposal anymore, but God's (Rom 6:1–14)! Yes, our flesh, with its passions and appetites, is a handle the devil uses to draw us away from holiness, but our bodies have another force within: faith and the Holy Spirit. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19–20). Yes, it is the righteousness of Christ alone that makes us acceptable before God. But with our heavenly future guaranteed by Jesus, we are left in the world to be of service to the bodies of others.

Providers for the family sustain the bodies of their spouses and children by earning an income. Law enforcement officers protect our bodies by restraining danger and evil. The state provides peace and stability for our human lives to flourish with opportunity. The church has, as its main goal, getting you to the new creation – getting your body to rise in glory from your grave someday.

So take seriously the responsibility that having a body puts on you. Every sin of thought, word, and deed requires confession and faith in Jesus. But this body, claimed for the kingdom, is renewed to be a blessing to others as Christ gave His body to be a blessing for you.



Do I Have to Do Good Works?

by **PASTOR MICHAEL K. SMITH**, Vice President of the ELS,
Bethany Lutheran Church, Ames, Iowa

Ask that question of a student about to be confirmed and you're likely to get the answer, "No." If they really want to be thorough, they might even start to recite part of Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him...." We don't have to do anything to be a Christian, to come to faith. God has done it all for us in Jesus.

But what about after we're brought to faith in Jesus? Does God want us to do good works then? Definitely. And so we go to church, we go to confirmation class (or Sunday school or Bible class), we give our offerings, we serve on some church board or committee or help set up communion or are at the parsonage workday or we sign up to clean the church or do whatever else needs to be done. Of course, our good works aren't limited to church-related activities. Being a good spouse or mom or dad or child or student or boss also fall into that category of good works. Praying for people in need, being a good neighbor at an assisted living facility, shoveling an elderly neighbor's driveway...the list is endless. God wants us to serve Him wherever He puts us.

Why does God want us to do good works? It's not as if God needs anything from us. "The earth is the Lord's and everything that fills it, the world and all who live in it..." David says (Ps 24:1 EHV). God didn't even need all the sacrifices His Old Testament people offered! "I do not need to take a bull from your barn or goats from your pens, because every animal in the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand mountains" (Ps 50:9-10 EHV).

As God's people, we do good works because we want to. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19 EHV). We do

good works as a response to God's love for us. And we do good works because our neighbor needs us to!

God serves those around us through the good works we do. This is the concept of vocation that Luther stressed so well. The ways we fulfill the duties of all the various vocations God puts us in is how God serves our neighbor. Your spouse needs you to fill their days with love and support. Your child needs you to train them in God's Word and take care of their physical needs. Your teacher needs you to be a diligent student. Your boss needs you to work hard so that project gets done. Your employee needs you to be understanding when they're not firing on all cylinders because they were up all night with a sick baby.

In a very real sense, we can say that God heals people through medical personnel and technology. We can say that God speaks to us as we sit in the pew on a Sunday morning because He's using the pastor to do so. God is the one who provides food through a fast-food worker.

How would God keep us alive and functioning in this life without people around us serving us in more ways than we can count? Everything God does for us through others is a demonstration of His creative power still at work. When we look at our neighbor serving us in some way, we're actually looking at God serving us.

What a privilege to serve God with our works. What an honor and blessing to be a conduit of God's creative power as we serve our neighbors. God doesn't need our good works—our neighbor does.



The Vocation of a Christian

Why am I here?

by **PASTOR ALEX RING**, Contributing Writer,
Christ Lutheran Church & School, Port St. Lucie, Fla.

A question every religion attempts to answer is, “Why am I here? Why did God put me on this earth?” I was one of those students who started college not really knowing what I wanted to do. I don’t know as I could have answered the question, “Why did God put me on this earth?” before I came to Bethany, but I could after. And I could do it because Bethany brought home to me the Lutheran concept of vocation, the teaching that God gives us talents and abilities so that we can be His hands here on earth. Or as Luther said, “God doesn’t need your good works, but your neighbor does.”

I kept hearing from people that I shouldn’t waste my talents, by which they meant, “Don’t do a job that is beneath you, like stay a grocery store clerk or work in a bank. Do something important.” I was thinking about going into medicine because I liked science and was pretty good at it, but I can’t say I was passionate about the idea. On the other hand, no one tells you you’re wasting your talents when you go into medicine.

Now, being a doctor is a good thing, a worthy thing. But Bethany was the first place where I heard the message that it didn’t really matter what I did, so long as I was using my talents in service of the people that God put in my life. That it was all important. It was a liberating message for me, because it meant I could imitate these professors that I had come to respect. I could study things that I was passionate about like literature and Latin and learn how to teach them to others. My daughter could get an English degree, go on to be a stay-at-home mom, and be told she is doing something important. This changed my career path, and literally changed my life. It is what sent me into teaching. And really, who wants to be a doctor when you can be a teacher?

The teaching of vocation is such an important one that in our schools it takes second place only to the teaching of Grace Alone. Our schools believe it is important for students to know the truth that God is the one who gave you your abilities and skills, and that as you use them in service of the people around you, they are never wasted. Not all can aspire to the lofty goal of teaching, but God has need of accountants, nurses, mechanics, and graphic designers too. More than that, He has need of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors. We are all doing important, God-pleasing, holy work as we serve each other.

SYNOD NEWS

Multiple Advent Baptisms and Confirmations



by **PASTOR TIMOTHY BUELOW**, Contributing Writer
Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

On the 4th Sunday of Advent, Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Lake Havasu City, Arizona had the incredible experience of multiple baptisms and confirmations.

One Sunday toward the end of August, our elders were both gone on a communion Sunday. Therefore, I verbally announced and explained to those gathered the printed announcement of our close communion practice so that non-members wouldn't wander forward. I said, "Those wishing to commune with us should speak with me after the service about a class to prepare them for communion." To my great surprise, I had a number of what had become regular visitors during the summer wait to speak with me. I told them we would start a class in September, giving me a couple weeks to contact other prospects about joining in. I promised them that if we worked hard, they would be able to commune with us on Christmas Day—the Day our Lord became flesh and blood.

We met each Monday night for an hour and a half, diving into Lutheran theology in a course following the outline of the Lutheran liturgy. Each week, they came more eager than the

last. They inwardly digested all they learned and their hard work came to fruition on December 21. Six adults were confirmed, three of whom had not been baptized until that day. Along with them, the five-year old son of one of the adults was baptized. The six eagerly vowed to remain faithful to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which they confidently confessed are the teachings of Holy Scripture correctly understood. Another weekly attender, who wasn't ready to commit to class in September, began classes in the new year. Our congregation is ecstatic to witness firsthand the power of the Gospel to bring people into the church, bestowing faith, forgiveness, and forever happiness with Christ!

On a side note, one of the gentlemen, Eric Wunderlich, when asked how he'd like me to pronounce his name, said, "the German way," and then asked half seriously if he could be baptized in German. "Natürlich," I answered. And on the following Sunday, he was! "Ich taufe dich, Eric, im Namen Gottes des Vaters, des Sohnes, und des heiligen Geistes. Amen."