

Pathways

Session 8

Vocation through service



RESOURCES FOR THE PRESENTER



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Purposes of Session 8

For the participants to:

- explore the concept of Christian service in the light of the Lutheran understanding of vocation
- reflect on their different roles and responsibilities
- consider areas into which God is calling them to serve

Reflection stimulus

Before Luther the word vocation (Latin: vocation and German: Beruf) had been applied only to people who had a 'religious vocation', people called to be priests or monks or nuns. Luther challenged that usage and the view of human work it presupposed, that some are doing God's work but others are not. Luther argued that the station of every Christian was a calling from God to serve the needs of our neighbour where we are as we are able. It isn't that we need to serve God separately from our work. We serve God through our service to each other. Luther used the word vocation, therefore to apply to the work and duties of every person. The fish-pickler, the shoemaker, the schoolteacher, the mayor, the street cleaner, the prince, the pastor, the parent, even the student – each of these has a work and a responsibility given to her or him by virtue of this station.

[Tom Christenson, The gift and task of Lutheran Higher Education, p49]

Focus questions

- What is Luther's concept of vocation?
- What is Christian service?
- In what areas of life do you have a sense of service?
- How is the concept of service developed in the school community?

Biblical focus

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all – he is the greatest'.

Luke 9:46-48 (NIV)

In the same way, let your light shine in front of others. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will praise your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 (NIRV)

Theological focus

The word 'vocation' is often equated in school circles with 'occupation' or 'career', for example when speaking about 'vocational counseling' rather than 'career counseling'. 'Vocation' is seen as a means by which people make money and build up status in society. Often the idea of serving others by using one's gifts and talents for the welfare of others is missing.

Theologically, 'vocation' has a much wider meaning. Christians are called (*voco* = 'to call' in Latin) to faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 4:1-5). They are also called to live a life of service to their neighbours (Eph 2:8-10), serving God by serving others. This service leads ultimately to praise of God as Christians function as salt and light in the world (Matt 5:16). The call to faith (vocation as believers) and the call to serve the neighbour (vocation to serve in the world) are inseparably connected for Christians. Faith is directed towards God: good works are directed to the neighbour.

Service may be motivated by a sense of care and responsibility for fellow human beings. While this may be based on a number of different motivations, theologically this can be seen as operating from an understanding of God as creator and all human beings as brothers and sisters of God as Father.

Jesus Christ, the suffering servant of God (Phil 2:6-11), came 'not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Matt 20:28). Christians are called to identify with Jesus Christ in serving others. This is the cross which disciples of Christ 'take up' as they follow Christ (Matt 16:24).

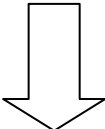
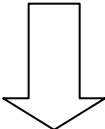
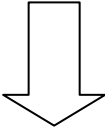
Every person finds him/herself in a variety of areas of responsibility in life. Thus a person can be a child, a parent, a sibling, a grandparent, etc., all at the same time. The person may have a paid occupation, serve on various community groups, have various roles within the congregation, work in the canteen at a school, be a volunteer caregiver, etc. All of these responsibilities become part of 'vocation' when they are used to serve others, and when that service is done in response to the love of God in Jesus Christ. A person may also find considerable changes in their places of vocation through life. The birth of a child, a new place of employment, the death of a family member, retirement, a change in place of residence, etc., all lead to significant changes in vocation.

One of the challenges for a staff member in a Lutheran school is to maintain a balance between the various areas of responsibility which that staff member has. He/she needs encouragement and support to ensure that a healthy balance is established and maintained. Staff members may also need assistance to deal with the pain, frustration, failure and even tragedy which may come in vocation as problems arise within the relationships of home, school and congregation. This is where we can 'bear one another's burdens, and in this way fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2).

Concepts in focus

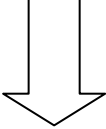
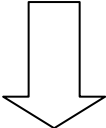
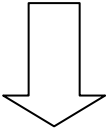
- I see my teaching as 'vocation' – recognising and using the gifts God has given me in the service of others
- I respect my responsibilities in education to church and to state
- I witness to my faith in my various areas of responsibility
- Spirituality means living as God wants me to live in the world in serving him by serving others. The school is one context in which I explore and develop my spirituality
- I see my serving in the light of Jesus' service to me: theology of the cross

WORKSHOP Option 1

<p>Stimulus</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to draw a picture of themselves surrounded by the various roles or responsibilities they have at home, school, local worshipping community, local community, etc. In the picture they show the strength of the relationships and levels of commitment to these various roles. Ask them to reflect on their time in the last week and to create a pie graph to show how they have spent their waking hours. Ask them to spend some time reflecting on how the priority given to roles and responsibilities given in the first activity is reflected in the second. Is there congruence or inconsistency? What challenges lie in trying to maintain congruence between keeping balance in life with the different roles and responsibilities?</p>
<p>Reflection</p> 	<p>Read or review the Resource Handout, <i>Vocation</i>. Participants reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you find interesting/challenging about the way vocation is described? • How does it relate to/expand your understanding of service? • In what ways did you find the description of vocation as encouraging/enlightening for your roles beyond the school and for your work in the school?
<p>Sharing</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to share their responses to the questions with a partner or in small groups.</p> <p>Each pair or group can be asked to report on the key points of their discussion.</p>
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Provide time for the participants to reflect on their many different roles and responsibilities and the way God is using them in service of others.</p> <p>Provide time for the participants to pray using Matthew 5:16 as their focus.</p>

Pathways: spiritual focus

WORKSHOP Option 2

<p>Stimulus</p> 	<p>Show the Picasso artwork on the cover and ask the participants to share their thoughts on friendship and service of one another.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what areas of life do you have a sense of service? • In what ways, if at all, is God connected to the service? • What message has the school communicated about service both explicitly and implicitly?
<p>Reflection</p> 	<p>Provide the participants with the Resource Handout, <i>Vocation</i> and provide time for reading and reflection on the questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Luther's view of vocation impact on the way you see your different roles and responsibilities? • How does it impact on the way you view and interact with others? • How does it provide a basis for maintaining balance in our lives? <p>Participants share with a partner or small group their responses to the questions.</p>
<p>Sharing</p> 	<p>Provide the participants with the Resource Handout, <i>Christian Service</i> and provide time for reading. Ask the participants to discuss in pairs or groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Christian service? • What challenges do these passages place before me? <p>In groups they complete a number of endings to the sentences beginning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian service is not ... • Christian service is ... <p>Share these and provide time for comment or questions.</p>
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Close by saying together the <i>Prayer of St Francis</i> (see Resource Handout).</p>