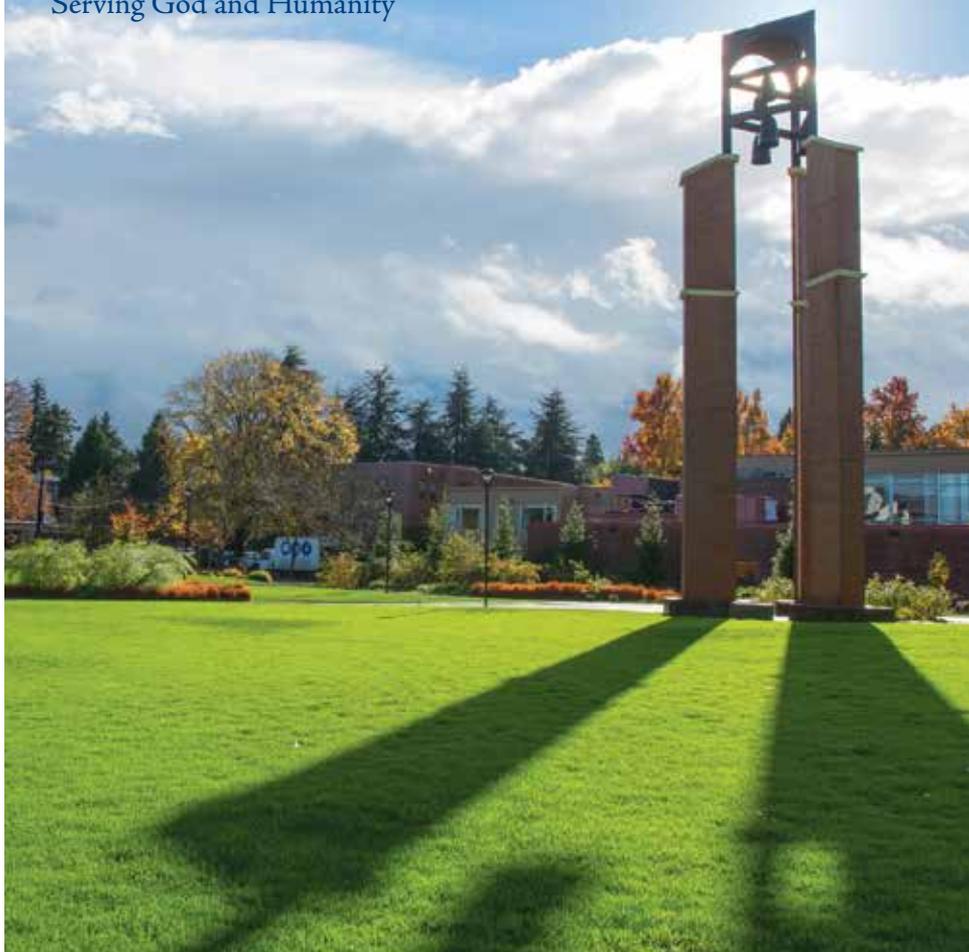


# Here I Work

My Vocation at Concordia University–Portland:  
Serving God and Humanity



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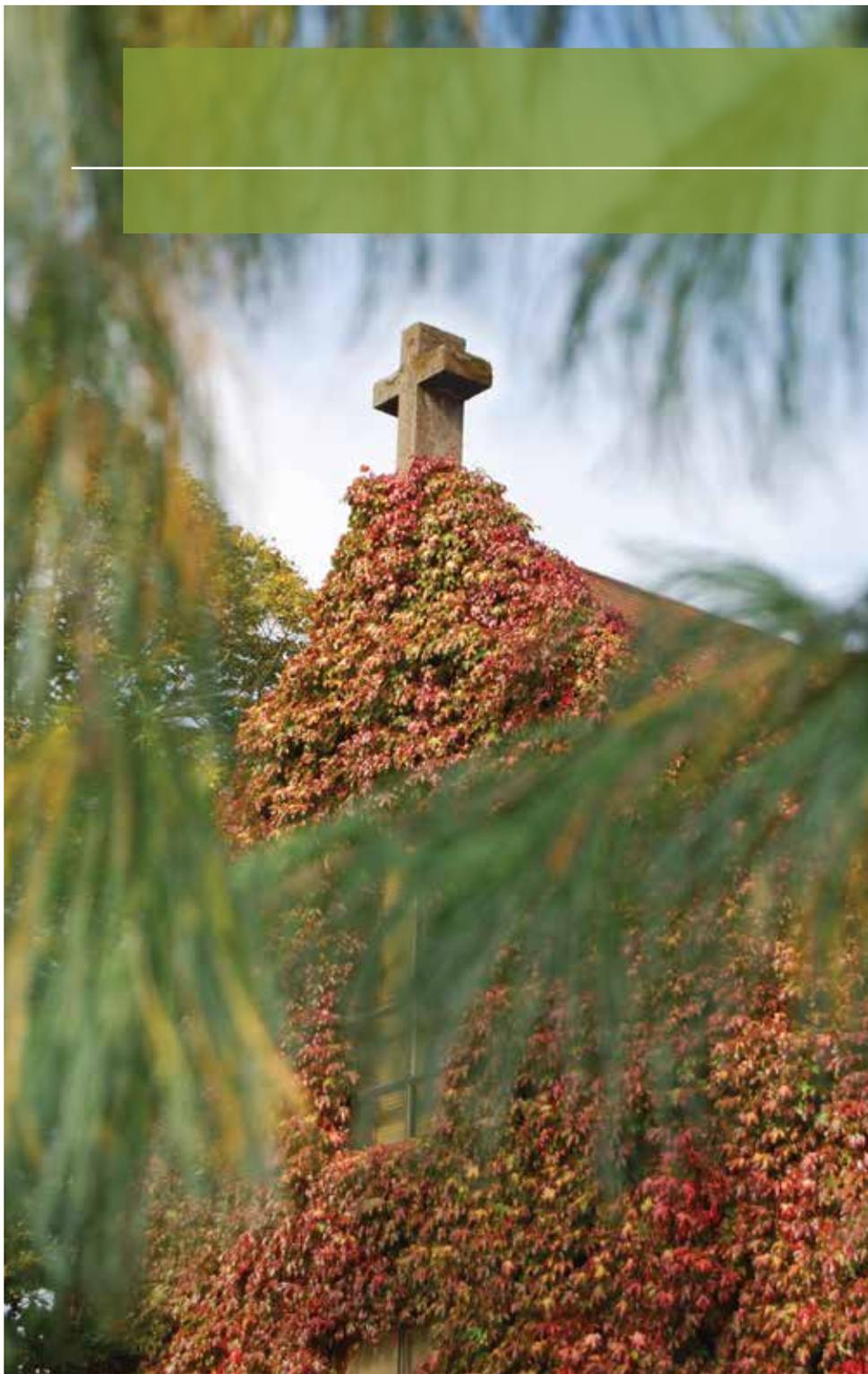
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## Here I Work

My Vocation at Concordia University, Portland: Serving God and Humanity

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# God is glad that you are here.

## Introduction

If you have been given this booklet to read we are presuming that you are either considering a position at Concordia or have already accepted employment with the university. We think we work at an exceptional place; an institution which intentionally views what we do as faculty and staff in a different light than much of the world around us. Some things are the same of course. We still need to get the work done. We get paid. We sometimes are weary and sometimes elated by our jobs. We do not mean that working at Concordia University is in every way different or that it is always perfect. What we do find different however is the set of lenses we use to interpret how and what we do. Out of that different vision we do what we do differently and for different reasons. And those reasons helped Concordia University focus its ministry and efforts in three main areas or core themes: Lutheran identity, academic rigor, and servant leadership. But it is our Lutheran identity that gives unique definition to that different vision that shapes the way we approach our work. We should simply say this as well: we really like those reasons and our core themes and find them to be healthy and good.

This discussion of work and employment needs to start in the right place which is: God is glad that you are here. He delights in what you do and through you God does amazing things for the sake of people including students, staff, and faculty here at Concordia.

If we are to make any sense of that statement, we need to dive a little deeper into Concordia's Lutheran tradition called "Vocation."



## 1. Historical Context

Christians have always lived within a tension between the kingdom and rule of God over heaven and earth and the pull and push of the work-a-day world. Jesus called His first disciples away from their nets to follow Him and He made them fishers of men. (Matthew 4:18-22). On the other hand, Paul, a teacher and missionary and writer of many letters in the Bible conducted most of his ministry as a small businessman, operating a tent-making enterprise (Acts 18:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 2:9). Jesus described His followers with an enigmatic phrase: they were to be in the world but not of it.

Throughout history, the followers of Jesus have labored to keep these two things in a healthy balance. But it is not easy. Sometimes they have been too much of the world, and at other times not being sufficiently in the world. The Lutheran movement, of which Concordia is part, was born in just such a time. Late medieval society (1300-1500 AD) held that a monastic life or being a priest (not of the world) was a shorter but steeper ascent into heaven than the life which was lived out as a soldier, a laborer, a farmer, or a mother (in the world).

One of the reasons the Lutheran Reformation succeeded in the 1500's was because a man named Martin Luther, a former priest in the Roman Catholic Church, articulated the notion that all of life was sacred. The monk or the priest did not do anything more holy than the mother who cared for her children or the cobbler laboring over a pair of shoes. God's hand blessed all of these things. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection gave meaning to each of these "vocations." The priest served God as a priest, but the cobbler served God as a cobbler. And the same needs to be said of the mother caring for her children, the stable boy cleaning out a stall, and the king exercising justice and making laws.



# All of life is sacred.

In effect, Luther ended up rendering the whole of the human life sacred. Even something as mundane as going to sleep at night became a service rendered to God as people cared for the body which He had given to them. God did not care for and become more involved with the monks and nuns in the religious orders than He cared for and was involved with the people of every other walk of life. For people who had been told for generations that real Christians wore priestly stoles and monastic robes and prayed seven times a day in a monastery, this was liberating. It gave them occasion to see their whole world differently, as something which was holy and good.

## 2. Contemporary Context

Today of course, we live in a very different context than the 16th century citizen. In Luther's time men and women were flocking to religious orders and it was a religiously charged atmosphere. We may still honor and respect those who pursue a religious vocation as a pastor, monk, or priest, and we might even think of that life as holy, but the culture at large is not terribly interested in such holiness. One's faith is a private matter. Our public life, especially as far as the state is concerned, is to be separate from our spiritual life. When it comes to understanding our employment, this perspective suggests that our work is simply a means to make money which we need to survive and nothing more. Spirituality is an activity for the weekend, if at all. Some participate in religious worship services, others define spirituality in an experience of nature or some act of service, but it is safely isolated from the rest of the week.

There are some very good reasons behind this development. Terrible wars were fought in the name of a particular religion during the 17th century in which an overly robust mingling of church and state led to conflicts. Many people died and countless more suffered. The result was that many thinkers and leaders of that time then articulated a private role for religion in order to save religion from self-destruction. But one of the results of this thinking was that the everyday

experience of most people living today in the modern world is stripped of any reference or relation to God outside of Sunday mornings. Religion was saved, but only for one day a week.

Although addressing a different context and time, Luther's understanding of vocation also speaks to this generation. Rooted in the understanding that all we do is connected to God and what He wishes to do, we speak of an exceptional work experience at Concordia. God is not only interested in the hour spent in worship on Sunday morning, but His gracious, loving presence is extended to every moment of every day, including the working day. Our job is more than a job, it is worship, it is service, and it is holy.

### 3. Theology of Vocation for Today

#### WHAT IS VOCATION?

The idea that our work is somehow 'sacred' connects it to God and His vision for creation and humanity's role in it. As Christians, we believe in the One to whom all creation belongs, including humans. The whole of creation belongs to God (Psalm 24:1), though in His love He creates it for us and gives us joint management as stewards of it. Created in His image, He then calls those who would listen and respond to the ministry of taking care of the earth (Genesis 1,2) and to be a blessing to all the people and nations who live on the earth (Gen 12:3).

The word "vocation" means "calling," and for Christians this implies being called by God in faith (1 Cor. 1:1-2; 7:15) to love God and neighbor. As Lutherans, we chiefly show our love for God in worship and faith, while we show our love for neighbor in service to him/her and the world. This calling involves both a privilege and a responsibility, but as Lutherans we focus more on what God is doing through us rather than what we do on our own. As Gene Veith points out in his book, God at Work, the Lutheran idea of vocation is not so much a matter of the Law – what we are supposed to do – but rather of Gospel – a manifestation of God's action, what He has done and is doing. "In this sense, vocation is not another burden placed upon us, something else to fail at, but a realm in which we can experience God's love and grace, both in the blessings we receive from others and in the way God is working through us despite our failures" (p. 24).

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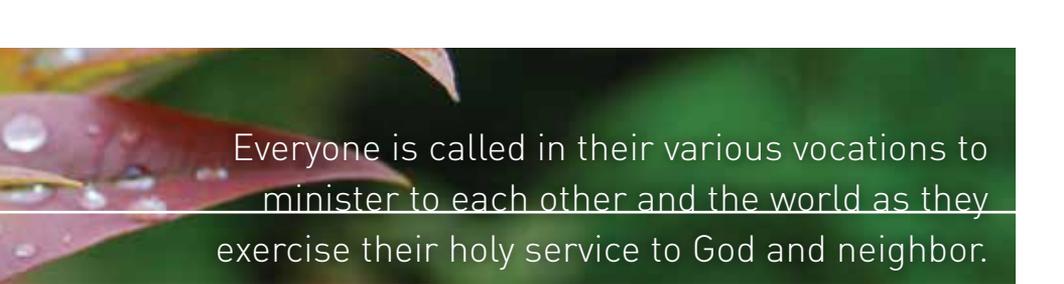
This sense of vocation takes seriously the idea that God chooses to work through things and people. As Luther notes, God could have decided to populate the earth by creating each new person from the dust, as He did Adam, but instead He chose to create new life through the vocation of husbands and wives, fathers and mothers (Veith p. 14). Even when we pray in the Lord's Prayer for God to give us "our daily bread," we experience Him doing so through the soil and seed, the farmer, miller, baker, and shopkeeper.

Luther goes so far as to call vocation a mask of God:

"That is, God hides Himself in the workplace, the family, the Church, and the seemingly secular society. To speak of God as being hidden is a way of describing His presence, as when a child hiding in the room is there, just not seen. To realize that the mundane activities that take up most of our lives – going to work, taking the kids to soccer practice, picking up a few things at the store, going to church – are hiding places for God can be a revelation in itself. Most people seek God in mystical experiences, spectacular miracles, and extraordinary acts they have to do. To find Him in vocation brings Him, literally, down to earth, makes us see how close He really is to us, and transfigures everyday life." (Veith p. 24)

This sense of vocation also takes seriously the idea that as Christians we are called to be a "Priesthood of all Believers." This does not mean that everyone is called to be a church worker, but rather that every kind of work has been turned into a sacred calling. It means that everyone is called in their various vocations to minister to each other and the world as they exercise their holy service to God and neighbor.

The Reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries stressed that each of us have several callings at the same time. We are called to our families, school, work, the state, and the world. The same person can be a daughter, wife, mother, and executive, while also serving on a school or community board and in a mission society. Each of these roles are important and juggling the responsibilities of



Everyone is called in their various vocations to minister to each other and the world as they exercise their holy service to God and neighbor.

each can be a challenge. In each of these vocations, however, “the authority, the prerogatives, and the divine presence belong to the office (i.e. the role) and not to the person who holds it” (Veith, p. 90). This means that even though we are not always good at what we do and make mistakes, we have our right to the vocation by God’s grace and can also depend on Him to help us in it.

Christians don’t minister only to material needs, however, but also to spiritual ones. Nevertheless, as Lutherans we understand that the Lord works in two “kingdoms” at once – the Kingdom of the World and the Kingdom of God. And though He rules in both, each has its own prerogatives. And while Christians are to be in the world but not of it, we are called to live in tension with the fallen world. “We are not allowed to eliminate the tension by either retreating from the world or uncritically embracing it” (Veith, p. 67). We engage in the world by carrying out our vocations. And although there is often no specific way of being a Christian carpenter, for example, Christians are called to be “salt and light” to the world by living out their faith even as they live out their vocations. Being faithful at what we do in each of our vocations, with God’s help, is often the catalyst for being asked to witness to the hope that is within us in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). Christians, in carrying out their vocations, are different. And people notice.

## NEGOTIATING VOCATION

When Lutherans talk about the entirety of life being sacred, we also acknowledge several practical tensions and welcome them. We believe that Concordia University will be best served by people who are attending to their various vocations as spouses, parents, children, faculty members, neighbors, citizens, etc. For example, if you are neglecting family for the sake of job, that is a vocational problem and ultimately the university, its students, and mission will suffer for that neglect. We are not suggesting this is easy and all of us have struggled on this score, but it is a struggle worth having.



Christians, in carrying out their vocations,  
are different. And people notice.

### SOME PRACTICAL TIPS:

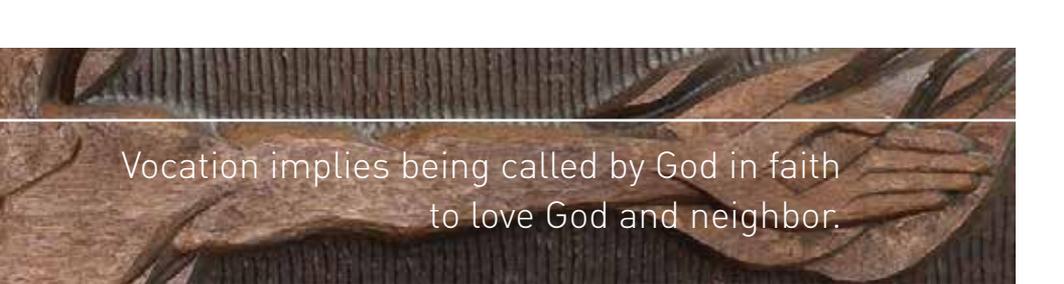
1. On a personal level it is helpful to prioritize your many vocations by asking, “Who can do these things?” There is only one person in the world who can be the spouse to your wife or husband. No one else can fulfill that vocation. That means being a good spouse is a high priority. Your children may have two parents but only one of you can be the father or mother. If this requires your specific role, you prioritize that. Your role at work likely can be fulfilled by others, but at this moment in time, God has chosen you to fill this vocational role. This question helps establish a healthy hierarchy of vocation. Vocational stress is common to all human beings. If you are finding this true for you, consult with a pastor, counsellor, or another trusted friend. You are not alone.
2. On a professional/staff level, remember that Concordia University embraces this theological perspective. We value your service, but never want anyone’s service to happen in a way which makes fulfilling your other vocational responsibilities impossible. Everyone struggles to balance work, family, and community. If you are finding yourself in a bind, talk to your supervisor. Concordia University wants to embody a workplace where we welcome the opportunity to strategize and plan for how your vocational service can be productive and healthy for you and the people you love.
3. On a collegial level, embracing a Lutheran understanding of vocation means we approach some challenges with greater flexibility. If someone is in need, we will often pick up the co-worker’s load to make it possible for him or her to attend to family or other needs. It is simply how Lutherans, in their vocational walk led by Christ, live with others in the workplace.



## Lutherans and Paradoxical Tension

You may have already noticed that Lutherans talk about tension, and talk about it like it is a good thing. We think so. We believe that out of tension comes good things. Here are a few classic Lutheran points of paradox or tension which we think are really important. You will want to know about these, may hear them in a meeting, or see them in an email.

1. **Sinner and Saint** – Lutherans never graduate from needing to repent and at the same time take comfort in the gracious love of God. I am 100% a sinner and at the same time I am 100% the beloved and perfect child of God right now.
2. **Law and Gospel** – Similar to the one above, it realizes that when we read the Bible, God sometimes is confronting the sinner and other times He is creating the saint in me. We call the effects of those parts of the Bible “Law and Gospel.” It is always happening when we read the Bible.
3. **Now and Not Yet** – God has given eternal life and yet I die. I am wholly an eternal child of God and I am wholly subject to this mortality. Both are true. In addition, though eternal life in heaven begins at death, I experience that eternity even now as I live.
4. **Sacramental Union** – When we go to communion, do we consume bread and wine or Christ’s body and blood? The Lutheran answer predictably is “Yes!” It is both bread/wine and body/blood at the same time in a physics paradox that no one quite can understand.
5. **Two Kingdoms** – we already mentioned this earlier, but this too is a paradox. I am wholly in the Kingdom of God and at the same time I am wholly a citizen of this country, a part of this world as well.



Vocation implies being called by God in faith  
to love God and neighbor.

There are many more of these. If you want to know more about any distinctive Lutheran ideas, there are marvelous resources in the library or in the faculty of the Division of Theology (DOT) on campus. The members of DOT (as well as others) truly do like to help folks explore these questions. It is a welcome break from the vocational tedium of grading. At the end of this document is a brief bibliography of some texts which will also help you understand more about what it means to work at a Lutheran institution.

## Academic Freedom

There is a policy statement on Academic Freedom in the Faculty Handbook and we urge you to read that carefully and take it as the final word on this matter. That said, however, there are a few things which bear mentioning. Concordia University values the freedom of its community to conduct conversations on a wide variety of topics, and feels that students, staff, and faculty who are engaged in free discourse on every subject is vital to our academic mission and congruent with our Lutheran heritage. No freedom, however, is absolute. Concordia asks that when it becomes pertinent to the discussion at hand in the classroom or the office or in meetings that the positions of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) on topics be presented fairly and honestly. Faculty members are permitted to dissent from such positions, but it then is necessary to indicate where you as a professor or staff take issue with an LCMS position.

## What Does This Mean?

A common Lutheran phrase often quoted, it serves us well to ask that question about vocation now that you have read this document. What then does vocation mean for each of us at Concordia University in day-to-day living and activities? What does it mean to be Lutheran in the classroom or in the office cubicle or when interacting with staff or students or faculty? What does Lutheran look like in life at Concordia? Though the following list is not exhaustive, it does give clues as to the activity and posture, the DNA Lutheran Christians model in order that Jesus is seen.

# What does this mean?

1. Lutheran means I live believing that only by God's grace am I His child.
2. Lutheran means I live believing that faith in Jesus is sufficient; I don't have to make it up to God.
3. Lutheran means the Bible is not a rule book, but a letter from God revealing His love to me through His Son, Jesus.
4. Lutheran means believing that God lives with us through the most common things in our lives – our parents, our friends, our teachers, our children, our students, our government, our courts.
5. Lutheran means I see my student or professional life as a divine calling for this moment in time.
6. Lutheran means I see the search for truth in all disciplines as a God-pleasing and inspired effort.
7. Lutheran means that whatever God does through me, I do to the best of my God-given ability.
8. Lutheran means through education we rigorously seek to develop our talents as able tools of God to serve in any future role.
9. Lutheran means Christ serves through me, using me as His instrument, and is ultimately the reason for my service.
10. Lutheran means that we act in the world with hospitality grounded in Christ's love.
11. Lutheran means God often gathers me to worship with His people to hear His Word and receive His gifts.
12. Lutheran means that God's means of serving and saving the world through His people not only involves joy and pleasure but often involves suffering and struggle.
13. Lutheran means loving someone unconditionally is not the same as affirming all they do and say.
14. Lutheran means I see Jesus in my students who learn.
15. Lutheran means when I teach I am the embodiment of Christ to my students.

Concordia welcomes you to this place where Jesus is known and proclaimed, and where, through your vocation, He is met by other faculty, staff, and students. We hope this little pamphlet was a helpful step toward understanding just where you work, why you do so, and how your vocation manifests itself in day-to-day life. May God continue to bless your ministry as you serve Him. To God alone be the glory.





## Additional Resources

### FURTHER READING ON LUTHER AND LUTHERANISM

You are always welcome to talk with the members of the Division of Theology or others about more resources.

- Benne, Robert. *Ordinary Saints*. Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2004. Robert Benne is a prominent theologian and ethicist in the academic world and a Lutheran. He argues for what a good life looks like and along the way sounds very Lutheran.
- Kittleson, James. *Luther the Reformer*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. This is a very readable biography of Martin Luther.
- Luther, Martin. *The Small Catechism*. St. Louis: CPH, 2008. There are many translations and editions of this text. It is the basic text handed to Lutheran children and adults who want to join the Lutheran movement for nearly 500 years.
- *The Large Catechism*. St. Louis: CPH, 1988. Again, multiple editions of this. The Large Catechism is not as frequently read, but was designed for those who would teach The Small Catechism.
- Marsh, Charles. *A Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Knopf, 2014. Bonhoeffer is a more modern witness to the Lutheran ethos. He was executed in a German prison camp shortly before the end of WWII.
- Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Crossways, 2002. Gene Veith is an adult convert to Lutheranism and often sees it through the eyes of an outsider. This is the text we cite above in the body of this booklet.
- Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Spirituality of the Cross*. St. Louis: CPH, 2008. This is an excellent book which many pastors are providing to their lay leadership. It marks out some of the distinctive elements of Lutheran faith and practice in the American context.

### IF A VIDEO IS MORE YOUR STYLE:

“Luther” MGM Home Entertainment: 2004

“Martin Luther” PBS, 2003



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