

Exploring Your Call

Everyone has a call to serve God and others. Most of us have several unique calls: as child of God, child, citizen, friend, worker, perhaps parent, spouse, etc. We talk most about our call to a particular career or kind of work. Martin Luther was adamant that it was not just priests and monks and nuns that had vocations, but every Christian had a calling, and that every honest kind of work could be a calling from God. I hope that you feel content and fulfilled in your unique calling(s).

For the sake of the church's ministry, we believe that God calls some persons to a public ministry of word and sacrament. For Lutherans, that doesn't mean a particular holiness, but that the pastor is called to a unique "function" to serve the church in particular ways. It seems that no matter where or when you find the Christian Church, there has been some pattern of leadership, no matter what those positions are called.

I'd like to talk about how a person might decide if they have a call to public ministry. How do you know if you have "a call?" There is a tradition of talking about an "inner call" and an "outer call."

The inner call is the gentle nudging that happens in our heart and spirit as God and our own intuition encourage us to pursue ministry or some other calling. Its persistence over the long haul is one of the distinctive features of the inner call. As we pray and meditate on this calling, we trust God will guide us into good decisions.

There is also an outer call. A strong community of faith encourages leadership and that should mean asking lots of people to serve as leaders and praising them when appropriate gifts are recognized. Mrs. Roble, Tim Roble's grandmother was a Sunday school teacher of mine who told me in about 6th grade that I should think about being a pastor. There were others. Those voices were encouraging. For those exploring their call, it's good to talk to other people about what they see in us. That's another way God speaks to us, through other wise and faithful people who know us well. We should also let others know what we see in them.

I have a call at Calvary because the congregation voted to call me. That is also part of the outer call of any pastor, an actual decision by a congregation to call someone and trust them to be their pastor. That follows a process of candidacy by the synod and the church to help people discern their calls to ministry.

And finally, Frederick Buechner says that we will each find our calling **at the intersection of our deepest joy, and the world's deepest need.** The particular needs around us also direct us to respond. I think this is why mission trips are so effective to help us decide what we should do with our lives, because the need is so evident on those trips.

If you feel a nudge toward ministry, there are several avenues to explore for ministry. The ELCA synods in this area have developed a GIFTS program for training Pastoral Assistants. In our Northwestern Minnesota Synod, this is a three-year training program to equip Christian lay-people to serve in the church by giving pastoral care, preaching, teaching, liturgy, doing evangelism, visitation, youth work, ministry to senior citizens, congregational leadership and ministry to the community. The site <http://www.nwmnsynod.org/ministry/GIFTS/index2.htm> has lots of information. For more information for those considering becoming an ordained pastor, AIM, lay minister or deaconess, you can go to the ELCA's Candidacy Leaders website www.elca.org/dm/candidacyleaders/. Resources are also available at Luther Seminary's website, www.luthersem.edu/. One of the new innovations that is just available is the ability to take up to two years of seminary on line, without having to move to a seminary. That may be a way to explore a class or two and see how it feels.

I would love to talk with any of you who feel God's nudge to ministry so we can explore how you might respond.

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