

WITNESS IN THE WORKPLACE:  
A LOCAL APPLICATION OF REFORMED UNDERSTANDINGS OF VOCATION

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A DOCTORAL PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

2024

*So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

- Romans 12:5-8 (NRSV)

*A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another.*

- Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*

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## PREFACE

I owe a debt of gratitude to many who have made this journey of the last three years possible. My wife, Beth, is first on that list. She has been there with support throughout. Her patience, good humor, and love continue to amaze and surprise me. What a blessing you are, Beth.

I am also deeply grateful to our fabulous 18-member cohort. We began as two distinct clergy clans, separated by an ocean and, as George Bernard Shaw once quipped, a common language. Along the way, over a wee dram or two (and perhaps more on occasion), we have discovered the joy of our common Reformed heritage and the common triumphs and tribulations of our respective ministries. The new friendships we have formed enrich not only our ministries, but our lives. Long may they continue. I suspect they will.

I include the faculty at both Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the University of Edinburgh New College in the list of those to whom great gratitude is due. Thank you collectively for stretching us and challenging us. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. Katie Cross who graciously agreed to be loaned from her home team at the University of Aberdeen to the Edinburgh squad for the purposes of this program. Katie, you have been an outstanding professor / 1<sup>st</sup> reader / advisor. You have opened up new vistas for me in the area of Ethnography and I am very grateful. Thanks, too, to Dr. Scott Hagley, whose guidance also helped shape this project and bring it to a successful conclusion.

Thanks to the Session and staff of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh who ably administer the Rev. Dr. Howard C. Scharfe Fellowship Endowment. Your generous financial support makes faithful, effective ministry possible. Thank you.

Many thanks to the Session and congregation of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church, the congregation I am privileged to pastor. Special thanks to the twelve participants who agreed to participate in this inaugural Faith and Work small group. Your support and engagement as I have undertaken this herculean task are further evidence of the deep faithfulness which has characterized the SSPC faith family for almost 300 years.

I reserve the greatest thanks and highest praise of all for our sovereign, providential God for his endless grace and boundless love that we know best through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On more than one occasion, I experienced the presence of God's Holy Spirit in this program, often in unexpected places and ways. My reverence and love for God has grown as a result.

Finally, having studied and written at length on the Reformed understandings of vocation, I would be utterly remiss if I failed to give God specific thanks and praise for calling me to the pastoral work I do. When I finally decided to trust and follow God's call to ministry 20 years ago, almost to the day, I was filled with anxiety and doubt. I soon discovered, however, that God had this calling in mind for me long before I ever heard it. It has been an adventure and a blessing, to be sure.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Question**

*How can the application of the Reformed theology of vocation within the context of a cohort of employed members of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania help cohort members find Christian meaning in the work they do and a greater sense of being Christ's witnesses in the workplace?*

#### **The Importance of the Question**

It is important to me to answer this question for both practical and personal reasons. Practically, this project will help me to understand how my congregation members experience faith at work, and whether their participation in a cohort of their peers in which I introduce Reformed understandings of vocation can increase their sense of being a faithful witness to Christ in their workplace. The central thesis underpinning this project is that the Reformed understandings of vocation are valid and foundational to participants' sense of holistic integration of faith and work, and that this sense of faithfulness can be enhanced through a structured curriculum involving the introduction of Reformed concepts of vocation in a group setting, applied in practical ways at work, and affirmed through individual and group reflection. I further theorize that the increased integration of faith and work, driven by a renewed sense of calling and giftedness to be Christ's witnesses at work, will produce in participants a greater sense of faithful witness and that this curriculum and practice may be of value to the wider church.

I began this research project with three fundamental assumptions. First, my hunch was that many if not most workers, including perhaps a significant portion of my

congregants, do not view their work as a holy calling and do not perceive the work they do as holy. Second, I assumed that the enhanced understanding of the Reformed sense of vocation and its intentional application in the work setting can bolster participants' sense of Christian witness and integration of their faith and work. Finally, I operated with the hunch that their engagement in a small group setting for the purpose of learning, mutual support, and group reflection can and will accomplish the thesis above. As I outline in chapters 3 and 4 below, I took steps to ensure that I remained open to the possibility of other conclusions. The results of my research were inconclusive regarding the first assumption but affirmed the latter two assumptions as I discuss in Chapter 3 and especially Chapter 4 below.

Another practical reason why answering the research question is important to me is the implication for the wider church and the culture in which the church operates. J. Daryl Charles, Affiliate Scholar of the John Jay Institute, writes “There is a vastly compelling need for resources that will enable pastors, priests, educators, Christian leaders, and indeed laypersons themselves to cultivate a vision for (1) the design and dignity of work, (2) the importance of the doctrine of vocation, and (3) the high calling of the workplace ... Nowhere will our presence be felt as it will in the marketplace. Nowhere else will the fruits of our faith be more on display.”<sup>1</sup> As Charles and numerous other scholars note, the church and the academy have in many ways failed to see this possibility for transformation. For the better part of 500 years, clergy and theologians have not fully addressed the Reformed doctrine of vocation and its vast implications for work, workers, and the wider world. A primary reason for the continuation of this neglect

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<sup>1</sup> J. Daryl Charles, *Our Secular Vocation: Rethinking the Church's Calling to the Marketplace* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2023), 15.

in modern times, as contemporary studies have shown, is the widespread hostility and suspicion among clergy and theologians pertaining to the marketplace, capitalism generally, and those who participate in it.<sup>2</sup> Charles describes the inevitable impact on lay persons, writing “The tragic reality is that few people see their daily work as connected to the purposes of God and as a means to flourish.”<sup>3</sup> The disconnect is fundamentally theological. When the church and theologians remain silent and even mistrustful of the incarnational possibilities inherent in a renewal of the doctrine of vocation and its extension to all phases of work and life, humankind miss the opportunity and obligation to be faithful stewards of the created world. Charles describes that potential, writing “Our work, which expresses itself in and through our individual callings, serves as a vehicle through which we can bring redemption to the world in ways social, cultural, and spiritual.” Charles concludes that what is needed is nothing less than a new Reformation in which we reclaim the full scope and importance of the Reformed doctrine of vocation.

Another practical reason for my interest in answering the research question is its potential impact on the congregation I serve, Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. I will describe my pastoral context in greater detail later in this chapter, but it is sufficient to note here that our congregation, like so many, are rowing upstream against some powerful cultural currents. I am acutely aware that

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<sup>2</sup> David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91, 97, 99ff. Miller cites Laura Nash, “How the Church Has Failed Business,” *Across the Board*, July-August 2001 (New York: Conference Board, 2001); Laura L. Nash and Scotty McLennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values and Business Life*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); and John Green and Kevin E. Schmiesing, *The State of Economic Education in United States Seminaries* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 2001). See also Ronald Cooper, “Protestant Hostility Toward Capitalism,” *The Trinity Review*, Number 286, July-August 2009 (Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2009), <https://www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/The%20Trinity%20Review%2000264%20Rev286ProtestantHostilitytowardCapitalism.pdf>, accessed April 16, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 60.

younger generations of Christians are increasingly skeptical toward institutions in general and church in particular.<sup>4</sup> Another cultural challenge is the over-scheduling of busy families and the expansion of children's sports activities to time slots that conflict with church activities. In addition, here as elsewhere, most adults who work full-time spend more waking hours with their work colleagues than they do with their own families.<sup>5</sup> A new ministry growing out of this project which helps them intentionally integrate their faith and work would be a clear demonstration of the value and relevance of faith to important areas of life beyond Sunday morning. It might also be a means of attracting and engaging younger members in the life of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church. At the same time, such a ministry offered to all members of the community would answer the growing voices of our longer-tenured members that we have become too internally focused in our programs, and we ought to be doing more to reach out to those outside of the church. It is my hope that just such a new ministry will result from the insights gleaned from this DMin research project.

A fourth reason I am interested in answering the research question is both personal and practical in nature. The research question is important for me to undertake because answering it offers me the opportunity better understand my mid-life vocational transition in the years following 9/11 when I had a mid-life crisis through which God eventually led me to ministry. In the experience of moving from a 20-year career in sales and marketing to pastoral ministry, I recognized two things: first, the critical importance

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<sup>4</sup> "Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends," Pew Research Center, Washington D.C. (March 7, 2014), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>, accessed April 16, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, *American Time Use Survey 2022*, USDL-23-1364 (Washington DC: United States Department of Labor, 2023), <https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/activity-by-work.htm>, accessed April 16, 2024.

and sheer difficulty of faithfully discerning my vocation, and second, the utter dearth of available resources to help Christians like me to make this transition. Over the past 20 years as I have pursued my pastoral vocation, a lingering question has remained unresolved. Why was I not able to find Christian fulfillment in the work that I was doing in the business world? In 20 years of work in sales and marketing, despite a progressively upward trend in position, responsibility, and compensation, I struggled to integrate my faith with my professional work, and this caused me to feel unfulfilled in both spheres of my life. Pastorally, I am aware that some in my congregation share aspects of the professional and spiritual dissonance I experienced. Just as I found it helpful to be part of a group of Christian peers who were also seeking greater integration of their faith and work, I believe that creation of a cohort of peers will help my congregants increase their own sense of fulfillment and faithfulness as Christian witnesses at work. I now move to describe the context of my pastoral ministry.

### **Pastoral Context**

I have been the Senior Pastor / Head of Staff at Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg Pennsylvania since January 2016. I am assisted in leadership by a full-time Associate Pastor who began work two years ago. She is a second career pastor like me and a recent seminary graduate. This is her first call. The emphasis of her portfolio is engaging young families and young adults in the life and ministries of the church. She also leads worship and shares in pastoral care duties, as well staffing several committees relevant to her portfolio.

The community of Mechanicsburg is a fast-growing small town of 10,000 people located 8 miles west of the city of Harrisburg, the State Capitol of Pennsylvania. Over the last two generations, Silver Spring Presbyterian Church has gone from serving a tight-knit, rural farming community to a suburban congregation located in one of the fastest growing counties in Pennsylvania. Young families in which both spouses work full-time are moving into housing developments which have sprung up from former corn fields around the church. Congregational demographics have begun to skew younger as some of these young families have joined the church. Members of working age are employed in a mix of blue collar, service, and professional jobs. The major industries in which members work are state government, health care, education, transportation, and the legal and medical professions.

Congregational membership has held steady at approximately 550 as older members have died, offsetting the influx of younger members. The most recent congregational statistics are as follows, indicating a slightly younger skew than the average PCUSA congregation.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. Age Distribution of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church Membership**

25 and under	15%
26-45	19%
46-55	13%
56-65	22%
Over 65	32%

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<sup>6</sup> PCUSA, Office of the General Assembly, “2020 Comparative Summaries of Statistics,” <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/2020-comparative-summaries-of-statistics/>, accessed January 31, 2024.

Compared to the average PCUSA congregation, SSPC is among the top 8% in size. While the congregation is very large by denominational standards, it is small compared to the three much larger non-denominational Protestant churches within a few miles of us, each of which has thousands of members. This makes SSPC seem smaller than it is to our members. Contributing to this mentality, many older members in the congregation can still remember the hay-day of the church in the 1990s when SSPC had 1,100 members at its peak. In addition to the non-denominational mega-churches, there are numerous churches of other denominations, including Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Congregationalist, Methodist, Brethren, Catholic and Orthodox congregations.

The leadership structure of the church still echoes those days when we were twice as large as we are now. SSPC has 21 active Elders serving on Session (which also functions as the Board of Trustees in our unicameral system of governance) and 18 Deacons, as well as 11 standing committees of Session and several sub-committees. The church also operates a preschool on the premises which annually enrolls 133 children. It is widely regarded as the preeminent preschool in the area.<sup>7</sup>

Many of our most prominent ministries also date from the 1990s when congregational membership was at its height. Notably, our ROAR (Reach Out and Rebuild) ministry attracts 30 or so volunteer workers to repair homes from Maine to Florida several times a year. Most of these volunteers are now in their 70s and 80s. Many of the church's long-standing ministries and fellowship activities are run by older

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<sup>7</sup> In 2023, the Mechanicsburg Award Program selected the SSPC Preschool as the best preschool in the Mechanicsburg area.

members, and most of the church's financial support comes from older members who are retired.

The church is located on a 17-acre campus with a 1783 limestone Meeting House as its focal point. A chapel was added in 1885. In 1927, the Meeting House was completely renovated to its original 1783 state using hand tools. Following World War II, a gymnasium was built. In the 1960s, an office complex was added. In the 1990s, at the time the preschool was started, a multi-story classroom addition was constructed.

History is an important part of the identity and practice of the Silver Spring congregation. The congregation dates to 1734 when the first ordained pastor from Donegal Presbytery on the eastern shore of the Susquehanna River preached to worshipers gathered beside the spring of an immigrant farming couple from Scotland, James and Hannah Silver. Members are proud to claim that this makes SSPC the first church of any denomination in the Cumberland Valley west of the Susquehanna River. Over the following decades Scottish and Irish Presbyterians, known colloquially as Scotch-Irish, flowed into the valley. Many of these Scotch-Irish immigrants settled in the Cumberland Valley, causing the church to grow.

The church was present before the township in which it is located today, Silver Spring Township, which takes its name from the church. The church enjoys a close relationship with the township, sharing space with township programs and, until recently, serving as a polling place. An entire hallway inside the church is devoted to the story of the church's growth and its expanding ministries. The historic Meeting House and pre-Revolutionary War cemetery attract visitors year-round and historical groups place numerous flags at the graves of soldiers who served in the Continental Army. During the



American Civil War, Confederate troops camped on the church property briefly, before being recalled to fight at Gettysburg. Having provided an in-depth description of my pastoral context, I now offer an overview of the chapters which follow.

### **Summary and Chapter Overviews**

In this chapter I have outlined the primary research question I am seeking to answer, which is “How can the application of the Reformed theology of vocation within the context of a cohort of employed members of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania help cohort members find Christian meaning in the work they do and a greater sense of being Christ’s witnesses in the workplace?” I have also described the reasons why it is important to me to answer this question. I then gave a detailed description of my ministry context. Now, I offer an overview of the chapters to follow.

In Chapter 2, I will provide an overview of the biblical and theological basis for the Reformed doctrine of Vocation. I will begin by exploring the biblical roots of vocation. I will then review Martin Luther’s development of the concept of the Priesthood of All Believers and his understanding of vocation that emerged from it. I will then trace more recent theological reflection on the Reformed understanding of vocation, beginning with Miroslav Volf and his influential critique of Luther and his proposal of a pneumatological theology of vocation and work. I will conclude with an examination of the more recent work of J. Daryl Charles, including his critique of Volf and his proposal to reclaim Luther’s concept of vocation, adding missional accents of his own to bring it into the context of contemporary work.

In Chapter 3, I will provide an overview of the research project and the results it produced. I begin by reviewing the purpose of the project and the nature of practical steps it involves. I will then describe in more detail the pre-course research and planning, the implementation of the project, and the post-project analysis. I will conclude with the results of the project, including the initial and final surveys, the Skills Grid exercise, and nine themes I identified through ethnographic analysis of the class transcripts.

In Chapter 4, I will evaluate the research project to highlight aspects of the research that were effective and point out aspects that could have been improved. I will then further evaluate the nine themes identified in Chapter 3 to indicate what was surprising and to suggest a grouping of the nine themes into four categories that, through more analysis, reveal key learnings of the project in relation to the biblical and Reformed understandings of vocation and work. I will then outline the implications of the project for my ministry and possible application to the wider church. I will conclude by suggesting some avenues of further research on the central research question.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Scriptural Roots of the Reformed Understandings of Vocation**

The theological theme of my research is the Reformed understanding of vocation and its implications for Christian witness in the workplace. In this chapter, I will begin by exploring the biblical roots of vocation. I will then review Martin Luther's development of the concept of the Priesthood of All Believers and his understanding of vocation that emerged from it. I will then trace more recent theological reflection on the Reformed understanding of vocation, beginning with Miroslav Volf and his influential critique of Luther and his proposal of a pneumatological theology of vocation and work. I will conclude with an examination of the more recent work of J. Daryl Charles, including his critique of Volf and his proposal to reclaim Luther's concept of vocation, adding missional accents of his own to bring it into the context of contemporary work.

My primary scriptural resources come from the creation narratives in Genesis, Paul's affirmation of the supremacy of Christ in the Christ Hymn of Colossians 1, and Paul's understanding of the source and purpose of varied gifts and callings as the vehicles for building up the body of Christ through faithful Christian living which he outlines in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12.

#### *(i) Genesis 1 and 2 – Creation, Imago Dei, and Labor*

I begin with an analysis of the key texts in Genesis which undergird the Reformed understandings of vocation. By Reformed understandings of vocation, I refer to the

theological tradition that emerged from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation, originating with the theology of Martin Luther, with particular regard to vocation as this understanding was affirmed by the French Reformer John Calvin and in the contemporary understanding of scholar J. Daryl Charles.<sup>8</sup> I understand vocation to be one's calling. I draw on Paul's use of the Greek *klesis*, which Luther translates as "*beruf*" or "stand" meaning "station" or "location," understood as everyday work, which is assigned by God, along with the gifts to do that work.<sup>9</sup>

In his influential commentary on Genesis, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann identifies the two creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 as neither mythological nor scientific as some have proposed, but rather what he calls "the covenantal proclamation" of Israel's sovereign, gracious God who enters into covenantal relationship with creation and invites all creation to a doxological response.<sup>10</sup> God is bound deeply and inextricably with creation, a decisive fact that determines not only everything else in the entire biblical narrative, but in all of life, as well, including "all other philosophical and political questions (i.e. issues of meaning and power)" and "all social well-being."<sup>11</sup> The form of the text itself echoes older Middle Eastern origin stories notably the Babylonian creation narrative Enuma Elish.<sup>12</sup> The Genesis creation narratives

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<sup>8</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 234. See also Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 159-162. Here Charles offers his assessment that Calvin, on the topic of vocation, amplifies Luther's thinking.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 549. Danker cites Romans 11:29 and I Corinthians 7:20 as examples. Also see Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, James L. Mays, Ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 12-13, 17, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Joshua J. Mark, "Enuma Elish - The Babylonian Epic of Creation - Full Text." In World History Encyclopedia. (Surrey, United Kingdom: World History Publishing, May 4, 2018.) <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/225/enuma-elish---the-babylonian-epic-of-creation---fu/>, accessed February 13, 2024. Also, see Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 14.

are unique in their emphasis on the creator's intimate relationship with humankind who are made in God's image and invited, though not compelled, to live obediently and faithfully with God.<sup>13</sup> Brueggemann perceives the text of the first creation narrative as emerging from within the Priestly tradition, written for exiles living in Babylonian captivity. This narrative provides hope to the exiles in the form of a theological counter-claim to the seeming triumph of the Babylonian gods over the God of Israel.<sup>14</sup> It is good news in the same way that the Gospel is good news, namely that "God and God's creation are bound in a relation that is assured, but at the same time is delicate and precarious" and which is "a source of rejoicing and delight for creator and creature."<sup>15</sup> At the heart of this text is the celebration of the creation of humanity, which elevates God's assessment of his overall creative work from "good" to "very good."<sup>16</sup> According to Brueggemann, humanity enjoys a unique intimacy with God, a relationship characterized not only by God's "peculiarly intense commitment" to humanity, but also the imaging of God in humanity as expressed in Genesis 1:26 – 2:15.<sup>17</sup>

Further, labor is part of the divine image which humankind bear. Work is an essential component of the divine creative activity in the first two chapters of Genesis. Far from being demeaning, harmful, and detrimental to happiness as ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato argued<sup>18</sup>, work in the creation narratives is the means to an Edenic world. God labors for 6 days and then rests on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, seeing

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<sup>13</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 13, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 26-7.

<sup>16</sup> J. Harrelson, ed., *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 8. The passage referenced is Genesis 1:31.

<sup>17</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 32-3.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Balme, "Attitudes to Work and Leisure in Ancient Greece," *Greece & Rome*, Volume XXXI, Number 2, October 1984, 140-141, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.pts.edu:2443/stable/642580?seq=1>, accessed February 13, 2024.

that his creation is very good. Thus, he establishes and validates the rhythm of work and rest for humankind. As those who bear the divine image, humankind are partners in God's creative activity.

The second creation account begins at 2:4b and draws on sources in the older J tradition. It focuses on the role humans play in cultivating Eden. At the beginning of the narrative, the garden awaits both rain from God and creatures to come and till it. God remedies this situation by creating humankind. The penalty for disobedience that God imposes on Adam, the cursing of the ground and the sweat and toil required to till it, does not occur until Genesis 3:3-19. This cursing is not God's original plan or intention for humankind. God then sows the seeds in the garden and puts Adam in the garden to till it and keep it in 3:23. Brueggemann deems humankind "the agents of God to whom much is given and from whom much is expected" through the undertaking of their divinely appointed work of "securing the well-being of every other creature and bringing the promise of each to full fruition."<sup>19</sup> Humankind are given both great power and great freedom to accomplish their God-assigned work. The nature and exercise of their power involve self-giving. They are to give of themselves to serve the needs and well-being of others, much as God did through the mighty acts of creation and, most clearly, in God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, in whom divine Lordship is demonstrated through self-giving servanthood.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 31-2, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 32-3.

*(ii) Colossians 1: The Christ Hymn and Christ's Lordship*

The Reformed understandings of Vocation also draw on the New Testament Epistles for scriptural support. In Colossians, Paul (or a close associate writing in his name) is writing to the church at Colossae, a church he did not know. He is writing in response to the warning from a fellow apostle, Epaphras, that the Colossians are engaged in worship of heavenly powers like the stars. Paul's purpose in writing is to steer the congregation away from such practices and reconfirm their understanding of the supremacy of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

In what is often called the Christ hymn in Colossians 1:15-20, Pauline scholar James Dunn understands Paul to be describing Christ's priority and supremacy as the balance between the original creation and the new creation to come.<sup>22</sup> Christ is the bearer of the full divine image in 1:15, "the image of the invisible God" and, as in 1:18, the image of the new creation as "the firstborn from the dead" through resurrection. The use here of the Greek word for image, *eikon*, has a specific technical meaning, namely that which takes the same form of something else, but which is itself not created as, for example, a stone or wood idol would be.<sup>23</sup> As scholar Lewis Donelson points out, "in this context, image denotes the power, the activity, the manifestation of the true being of God."<sup>24</sup> With regard to vocation, this provides further scriptural support for the

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis R. Donelson, "Colossians, Ephesians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus," in Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 30.

<sup>22</sup> James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 275.

<sup>23</sup> Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Donelson, "Colossians, Ephesians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus," 30.

understanding of the divinely authorized and inspired nature of work, since Christ himself was also a worker.<sup>25</sup>

Further, Christ was not only the divine agent of creation, but also the object and purpose of all creation. Paul is clear that Christ's purpose is to be the agent of God's reconciliation with humankind and therefor the source of coherence for all human activity since, as 1:17 affirms, "in him all things hold together." As a result, Christ's life of self-giving for the well-being of others gives purpose and shape to human vocation, which also takes the form of self-giving to meet the needs of others, modeled after Christ's own example. Further, as 1:18 affirms, Christ is "head of the body, the church." Paul's metaphor of the body carries significant ramifications for the Reformed understandings of vocation, as he develops it in greater depth in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12.

*(iii) Romans 12: The Christian's New Life in Christ*

In Romans, Paul writes to a church that he did not found, and which he has not visited, but which he knows to be divided. Further complicating the context of his letter, Paul is in need of support from the Roman Christians in order to extend his missionary work to the western Mediterranean. His objective in writing is both pastoral and missional.<sup>26</sup> The context of the letter is rooted in Emperor Claudius' expulsion of Jews from Rome in 49 CE, after which Roman churches became increasingly dominated by Gentiles. When Claudius died in 54 CE, the return of Jewish Christians to Roman house churches created great tension and conflict which reached its peak three years later at the

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<sup>25</sup> Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 995. Matthew 6:3 describes Jesus as a *tekton*, a worker in wood or perhaps stone.

<sup>26</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans's, 2016), 9-10.



time of Paul's writing.<sup>27</sup> Paul's pastoral goal in writing is to impress on both Jew and Gentile alike the power and mystery of God's grace, which may be received solely by faith, not works or heredity or any other false claim to righteousness and salvation.<sup>28</sup> Following his reassuring hymn of praise at the conclusion of Romans chapter 11, Paul urges believers in chapter 12 to respond out of gratitude to God. They are to give over their whole lives to seek and follow God's will. In contrast to animal sacrifices which require death but do nothing to please God without the accompaniment of ethical practice, Paul commends a transformed life as a living sacrifice. This new way of life results from a new way of thinking. In 12:2 Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." He is urging the Roman Christians to think in a new way about themselves, their community of faith, and the world around them, and then to live out this transformation of mind through an ethos of humility, self-giving, and bodily (i.e., physical and material) sacrifice for others. Paul calls this a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

This new, distinctly Christian mode of living finds expression in daily life, lived not as disconnected individuals, but together as one cohesive body of Christ. Paul describes this body in 12:4-5, writing "as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of it." Paul is emphatic that seeking the well-being of others is not just a matter of one's individual salvation. It is also the means by which God intends for the individual members of the Corinthian congregation to build up the overall

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<sup>27</sup> Leander E. Keck, *Romans*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Ed. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> James R. Edwards, *The New Interpreters Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, ed. J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 2007-8.

body of Christ. According to Pauline scholar Richard Longenecker, Paul is highlighting God's intention that the Roman Christians would use their particular gifts of various and differing kinds not as the means to differentiate themselves from and elevate themselves above others, but rather as complementary skills, talents, passions, and abilities to be used in concert with the gifts of others. In that way, God intends them to work together to build up the one body of which Christ-followers are a part.<sup>29</sup> This new Christian way of life is what Richard Longenecker describes as possessing "unity in its existence and a diversity of function among its members ... all of which results in a unity of the various parts, a recognition of the importance of each part, and the mutual service of each part on behalf of the health and welfare of the whole body."<sup>30</sup> As Paul writes in Romans 12:9-21, the true Christian life is characterized by love, seeking the good of others, overcoming evil by refusing to return it in kind, blessing others rather than cursing them, sharing in one another's joys and suffering, and, above all, by an abiding sense of mutuality, peace, and harmony.

With regard to the Reformed understandings of vocation, it is of particular note that no aspect of daily life is excluded from Christian living. The same self-giving servanthood and harmonious mutuality that are meant to characterize relationships, interactions, and activities within other spheres of life are also meant to govern the realm of human vocation and work. As such, human vocations, undertaken with this distinctly Christian mindset, have the capacity to be holy and acceptable in God's eyes. They are holy to the extent that they are undertaken as the result of each person's faithful discernment of God's will for her/his life, and with the intention of participating in God's

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<sup>29</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 928-29.

<sup>30</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 928-29.

ongoing creation by serving others as Christ served humankind, i.e. by giving of one's own God-given gifts to serve and meet the needs of others. Such vocational congruence with God's purposes and Christ's Lordship has the potential to be God-honoring and God-pleasing spiritual worship. Longenecker tends in this direction when he writes that, "God's good gifts to his people and his people's faithful expression of God's gifts ... must underlie all our Christian living, both individually and corporately."<sup>31</sup> Longenecker's extension of Paul's Christian living to all areas of life implies that not only individual vocations and work, but all economic proprietorships, partnerships, teams, organizations, and enterprises will be faithful and pleasing to God to the degree that they are governed by the Pauline ethos of humility, mutuality and self-giving servant leadership to benefit our neighbor.

#### (iv) I Corinthians 12: Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ

In using the body metaphor for the church in his letter to the Roman churches, Paul is drawing heavily on his earlier writings to the church at Corinth. Paul founded the Corinthian congregation in 50 CE and ministered among them for a year and a half before moving on to Ephesus where, two years later in 54 CE, word has reached him of growing conflict and division back in Corinth. Like the churches in Rome, the Corinthian Christians are a faith community bitterly divided. This is understandable given the astoundingly diverse, hyper-competitive, status-seeking culture which prevailed in Corinth. An economically and politically important provincial capital city, Corinth teemed with freed-persons and immigrants from all over the Mediterranean world and

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<sup>31</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 930.

beyond. Most were of low socio-economic status and eager to increase the perception of their importance, not unlike the culture of New York City in more recent times. The socio-economic competition that characterized the broader Corinthian community has carried over into status-seeking behavior and hyper-individualism within the Corinthian congregation where it is causing conflict. Paul's primary purpose in writing is to address these issues, especially the claim by some to possess gifts which are evidence of spiritual superiority over others.<sup>32</sup>

The root of this issue is the intervention of Apollos, another evangelist who, in Paul's absence, evidently steered the congregation toward the pursuit of heavenly wisdom. The experience and expression of such heavenly wisdom became a marker for high spiritual status.<sup>33</sup> In the Corinthian church, such lofty spiritual status was expressed at least in part through the practice of the spiritual gift of glossolalia, ecstatic speech which some scholars believe was practiced primarily by women seeking elevation from subordinate social roles.<sup>34</sup>

Regardless of the specific identity of its practitioners, the arrogance and individualism of those claiming this and other supposedly superior spiritual gifts is the issue Paul addresses in chapter 12. He begins his argument by affirming in 12:2-3 the primacy of Christ as Lord over all. As Pauline scholar Richard Horsley writes, "Paul is obviously framing the subject he is about to discuss. Right at the outset of his argument he both sets Jesus as Lord in authority over spiritual gifts and presents the confession of

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<sup>32</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *I Corinthians* in *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 30-1.

<sup>33</sup> Horsley, *I Corinthians*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul's Rhetoric* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1990) 135ff. Compare to Horsley, 34, who sees a more limited causative role of glossolalia among women in explaining the fractiousness of the Corinthian church.

Jesus as Lord as the criterion of being caught up in the Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> He moves on in 12:4-11 by affirming the diversity of individual gifts, their common origin in the Holy Spirit, and their common purpose in building up the community of faith. In 12:7, Paul writes, “To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good” before moving on to name a hierarchy of spiritual gifts, pointedly naming glossolalia last and further diminishing it by making it subject to the interpretation of tongues in 12:11.

In 12:12, Paul takes up the metaphor of the body to describe what life in Christ is meant to be like for members of the church, which is the body of Christ. Paul first points readers to the sacramental role of baptism and the eucharist in uniting the members of the body of Christ, just as the physical body “is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.” In 12:14-26, he stresses the interdependence of the individual members of the physical body. In 12:18, Paul claims that none of the body’s members can ever dissociate themselves from the others because, in the act of creating humankind, “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” Richard Horsley concludes that God designed the body of Christ to function in the same interdependent way as the physical body, writing “For Paul, the collective political body was as real in its concrete divine creation as was the embodiment of the person in her or his continuing social relationships. Indeed ... the concrete created reality of the political body necessarily means that it has many members.”<sup>36</sup> False claims of superiority and independence by the members of the body of Christ are therefore just as absurd and impossible as similar claims by the more prominent and higher-functioning

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<sup>35</sup> Horsley, *I Corinthians*, 168.

<sup>36</sup> Horsley, *I Corinthians*, 172.

members of the physical body, such as the eye and the head, to have no need of the other, supposedly inferior members.

Paul then takes the argument further, once again rooting it in divine creation, by affirming that “It is God who has given greater honor to the inferior member” so that “not only must there be no division ... in the body politic, but there must be an equal concern for one another among the members.”<sup>37</sup> The result of God’s design is interdependence, harmony, and solidarity among the members as Paul concludes in 12:26, writing “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

The Reformed understandings of vocation and work draw on Paul’s body metaphor as the basis for affirming that vocation and work are God’s design. Horsley points us to this broader application when he suggests that the interdependent and mutually supportive nature of the members of the physical body extends beyond the church to include all other areas of human existence. The Reformed understanding of vocation is drawn, in part, from this text and others like it, in which Paul understands the broad spectrum of human work as a response to God’s initiative and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God-given gifts vary from person to person, but all have the same purpose, which is to serve our neighbor as Christ served us, with humility, mutual concern, and self-sacrificing love as Paul describes in his so-called ode to love, the “still more excellent way” of 12:31 which he commends in chapter 13.

Further, on a more macroscopic economic level, it is conceivable that God intends us to use our gifts for the well-being and harmonious, smooth functioning of the various

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<sup>37</sup> Horsley, *I Corinthians*, 173.

initiatives and enterprises which are the locus of our work. This implies that we are to care for our work colleagues and teammates, to value the gifts that each brings to the work we do, and to be in solidarity with them, such that we suffer setbacks with mutual concern and share triumphs with equal joy and honor for all.

Finally, Reformed understandings of vocation and work consider that our gifts are not static over time and nor are our vocations, which may and often do change through the various stages of life. Indeed, our understanding and development of the gifts God has given us are clues to our intended vocation and the specific work we do. This implies that we must constantly be seeking to develop new skills and improve existing ones. We must also be in regular, prayerful, and analytical discernment to determine where it is that God intends us to use our gifts for his purpose of serving others and meeting their needs.

As I have shown above, the creation narratives of Genesis and Paul's letters to the Colossians, Romans and the Corinthians form the primary scriptural basis for the Reformed understanding of vocation. I now move on to illustrate how Reformed theologians have treated the scriptural theme of vocation.

### **Theological Developments of the Reformed Understandings of Vocation**

#### **(i) Martin Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers**

In the Reformed tradition, much of the understanding of vocation is rooted in the thought and writing of the pioneering 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformer, Martin Luther. As scholar Alister McGrath has observed, most of Luther's writing is not so much a systematic presentation of his theology as it is a pastoral response to controversies.<sup>38</sup> McGrath is by

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<sup>38</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 67.

no means the first theologian to cite the great complexity this introduces to the task of following the development of Luther's concept of vocation.<sup>39</sup> Luther's understanding of vocation and work emerges most clearly in his watershed tract, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation." In June 1520, Luther's teaching on the necessity of doctrinal, sacramental, and ecclesial reform of the church in order to bring it into conformity with the gospel was condemned by Pope Leo X. In August, frustrated at the refusal of the Roman Catholic Church to reform itself, Luther issued his broadside attack on the church hierarchy. One of his central arguments is the rejection of the church's distinction between the temporal estate of the laity and its supposed inferiority relative to the so-called spiritual estate of the priesthood. This assertion came to be known as the Priesthood of All Believers, though Luther himself never used that precise term. Luther writes, "It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy."<sup>40</sup> As proof, Luther points to the common sacrament, gospel, and faith shared by all Christians, and Paul's body metaphor of I Corinthians 12:14-26, writing that: "All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. Paul says in I Corinthians 12:12-13 that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves others. This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike."<sup>41</sup> Luther grounds his argument in his understanding of the doctrine of justification

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<sup>39</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1957), ix, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," in *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions*, ed. Denis R. Janz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 91.

<sup>41</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 91.



by grace through faith. He writes, “we are all consecrated priests through baptism,” as the result of God’s gift of “the wondrous grace and authority of baptism and justification.”<sup>42</sup>

### (ii) Martin Luther on Vocation

It is from this fundamental insight of the Priesthood of All Believers that Luther derives his teaching on vocation and work. Luther asserts that all workers are engaged in potentially holy spiritual work. He claims that “those who are now called ‘spiritual,’ that is, priests, bishops, or popes, are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them” because, while the specific work they do differs, all are spiritual by virtue of Word and Sacrament, so that “a cobbler, a smith, a peasant – each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops.”<sup>43</sup> For Luther, all believers, regardless of office or type of work, share a common baptism, which has the same purpose and is the consecrating act which renders all Christians priests, citing I Peter 2:9 and Revelation 5:9-10. Likewise, all believers share a common gospel and a common faith rooted in the Word.<sup>44</sup> In support of his argument, he cites the Roman church’s own canon law that in situations where no episcopally ordained priest is available, the laity may choose a fellow layperson, married or not, to baptize, say mass, preach, and forgive sins.<sup>45</sup> He then proceeds to build the foundational Reformed understanding of vocation on basis of Paul’s metaphor of the human body applied to the body of Christ in I Corinthians 12.

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<sup>42</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 91.

<sup>43</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 92.

<sup>44</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 92.

Luther examines Paul’s metaphor in detail to identify the nature, source and purpose of spiritual gifts, Christ’s inspiration and model for their use, and the characteristic nature of the faith community in which gifts are rightly used. Citing I Corinthians 12:1-11, where Paul identifies the Holy Spirit as the source of all spiritual gifts, Luther writes to his congregation, “you possess various beautiful divine gifts and offices. These are mutually related and emanate, not from man’s reason or faculties, but from the one true God. They are his work – the expression of his power.”<sup>46</sup> There is a fundamental and divinely ordained diversity of giftedness that is commensurate with the wide diversity of vocations in which God intends those gifts to be used. Following Paul, Luther acknowledges a “dissimilarity of gifts, offices, and works,” noting, however, that “all gifts are direct from one God, one Lord, one Spirit and to serve the same purpose – to bring men to the knowledge of the one God and to build up the church in the unity of faith.”<sup>47</sup> In a 2-part sermon series on Romans 12, Luther cites faith as the measure by which God graciously distributes gifts. “We have not merited our gifts. Where faith exists, God honors it with certain gifts, apportioned, or committed, according to his will ... Grace as well as faith bring these noble jewels – our gifts – to each one according to his measure.”<sup>48</sup>

From this scriptural basis, Luther affirms the purpose of vocation, namely “everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity; I Corinthians 12:1-11,” in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1536, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1535.w.0.1.10\\_241&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1535.w.0.1.10_241&hl=en), accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity; I Corinthians 12:1-11,” in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1536, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1535.w.0.1.10\\_241&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1535.w.0.1.10_241&hl=en), accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon for the Second Sunday after Epiphany; Romans 12:6-16,” in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1250. [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1249.w.3.0.98\\_119&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1249.w.3.0.98_119&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all members of the body serve one another.”<sup>49</sup> This is the duty of all Christians, regardless of status. Even Kings must serve others, as he affirms in his sermon on I Peter, writing “David was a king, and cast not aside his crown; so, he retained his royal glory. He held his office as a God-entrusted one, in the execution of which he served God. Similarly, should the righteous ruler do – in fact, all men in their respective offices and stations.”<sup>50</sup>

Luther cites Christ’s own gracious, loving, and self-sacrificial work as the inspiration and model for the faithful exercise of humankind’s giftedness for the purpose of serving others. Faithful workers are those “who humble themselves to serve others, according to the dictates of love.”<sup>51</sup> Here Luther points directly to Christ, writing that: “The suffering and work of Christ is to be viewed in two lights. First, as grace bestowed on us, as a blessing conferred, requiring the exercise of faith on our part and our acceptance of the salvation offered. Second, we are to regard it an example for us to follow; we are to offer up ourselves for our neighbors’ benefit and for the honor of God. This offering is the exercise of our love — distributing our works for the benefit of our neighbors.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 92.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter; I Peter 2:11-20,” in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1390. [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1389\\_287&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1389_287&hl=en), accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon on the Sunday Before Lent; I Corinthians 13:1-13,” *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1300. [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1299.w.2.0.214\\_294&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1299.w.2.0.214_294&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon on the First Sunday after Epiphany; Romans 12:1-6,” in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther* (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1241. [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1239.w.5.3.185\\_275&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1239.w.5.3.185_275&hl=en), accessed January 5, 2024.

Luther returns to Paul's body metaphor to describe the ethos of the ideal Christian community that results from the faithful exercise of our various gifts. This ideal community is characterized by humility, harmony, and mutuality. He writes, "Each member of the body is content with the other members, and rejoices in its powers, not being solicitous as to whether any be superior to itself. For instance, the nose is inferior in office to the eye, yet in the relation they sustain to each other the former is not envious of the latter; rather, it rejoices in the superior function the eye performs. On the other hand, the eye does not despise the nose; it rejoices in all the powers of the other members."<sup>53</sup> He concludes, "In short, no member lives and acts for itself; all obey and serve one another, and the more honored members serve most ... My efforts I direct to serving the body — all the members, my beloved brothers and partners. I assume no peculiarities. I would not cause discord and conflict."<sup>54</sup>

Luther takes the radical step of extending his argument to what the Church traditionally regarded as secular work. In a kirchenpostille on I Corinthians 7:20, Luther asserts that all Christians have vocations in each of three primary spheres of life: church, government/public life, and the household, which was where most work was done at the time.<sup>55</sup> In direct contradiction of the church's view that all work performed by the laity is necessarily secular, Luther emphasizes that work performed in all our various vocations is potentially holy, because it is not merely what we should or must do, but what God

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Second Sunday in Epiphany; Romans 12:6-16," in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther* (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1248, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1247.w.0.2.77\\_266&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1247.w.0.2.77_266&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Second Sunday in Epiphany; Romans 12:6-16," in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther* (Google DigiCat, 2022), 1249, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1249\\_71&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1249_71&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

<sup>55</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 22. I cite Veith here as a modern scholar who affirms Luther's understanding of vocation.

does through us. Luther emphasizes that God works through human means in the earthly realm, writing, “God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation it is.”<sup>56</sup> In his Sermon on Matthew 6:24-34: “God and Mammon. Do not be anxious” Luther writes that, “God gives us the wool, and that he grows on the sheep; but it is not at once cloth, we must labor and make it into cloth; when it is cloth, it does not at once become a coat, the tailor must first work with the cloth before it is a coat; and so God does with all things, he cares for us, but we must toil and work.”<sup>57</sup> By cooperating with God through the work we do, humankind become partners and co-creators with God. Scholar Gustaf Wingren writes, “in this realm, man is to perform works, as it is filled with office and vocations and constant labor, and here man’s freedom is active, thereby being an instrument in the hand of God who thus carries on his creative work.”<sup>58</sup> This is why Luther described human activity done out of spontaneous love for the neighbor as “God’s mask behind which he hides himself.”<sup>59</sup> Contemporary Lutheran scholar Eugene Veith agrees, writing, “God hides himself in the workplace, the family, the Church, and the seemingly secular society” and goes on to say, “Vocations are ‘masks of God.’ On the surface, we see an ordinary human face—our mother, the doctor, the teacher, the waitress, our pastor—but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 9 (citing WA 44, 6, Commentary on Genesis, 1535-45).

<sup>57</sup> Martin Luther, “Sermon on Trinity 15; Matthew 6:24-34 God and Mammon: Do Not Be Anxious” in *Lectionary Central*, ed. David G. Phillips, (Halifax, Canada: Anglican Diocese of Halifax and Prince Edward Island, 2024), <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/trinity15/LutherGospel.html>, accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>58</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 16. Here Wingren cites Luther’s the Bondage of the Will.

<sup>59</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>60</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 24.

Further, Luther is clear that the placement next to a specific neighbor, whether at home, in the community, or at work is not accidental. It is God's grace and an opportunity to cooperate with God in continuing creation.<sup>61</sup> In all spheres of life, including the economic sphere of work, "The result is a divine division of labor in which everyone is constantly giving and receiving in a vast interchange, a unity of diverse people in a social order whose substance and energy is love."<sup>62</sup> Secularists may see this as simply the economy, which it is, but theologically it is the interaction of vocations.<sup>63</sup> By way of example, Veith continues, "We pray in the Lord's Prayer that God give us our daily bread, which he does. He does so, not directly as when he gave manna to the Israelites, but through the work of farmers and bakers - and we might add truck drivers and retailers. In effect, the whole economic system is the means by which God gives us our daily bread. Each part of the economic food chain is a vocation, through which God works to distribute his gifts."<sup>64</sup> Such activity is eschatological in Luther's view in that it originates in the experience of Christ's love in the heart of the believer and is expressed as the grateful response to Christ's love in which the Spirit is at work breaking through the barrier separating the spiritual kingdom from the earthly kingdom. It is the mechanism by which God transforms the world. Indeed, as Luther notes in his commentary on Paul's list of the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, the joyous fulfillment of one's vocation is evidence of the Spirit's presence.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 172.

<sup>62</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on the Galatians," in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther* (Google Digtat, 2022), 1101, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1100.w.5.0.8\\_123&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT1100.w.5.0.8_123&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

Nevertheless, while Luther affirms the joy of fulfilling one's vocation through the use of our God-given gifts, he simultaneously understands work as we know it to be a far cry from that experienced by Adam prior to the fall. In God's original plan for creation, God's creation of humankind was wholly different and inconceivably more wonderful than the creation of any other creature. He writes, "though all the other works of God are full of wonder and admiration and truly magnificent, yet that man is the most excellent and glorious creature of all is evident from the fact that God in creating him had recourse to deep counsel and to a mode entirely different from that which he adopted in creating all the other creatures."<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, God's original conception of the work that humankind would do is a reflection of the unfathomable goodness of the work God performed in creation. God's prelapsarian intention was that humankind would enjoy labor to a degree beyond anything we now know. Luther writes in his commentary on Genesis, "By sin did man lose all this felicity. Nor would Adam, had he remained in all his original innocence, have lived a life of idleness ... he would have worked by tilling the ground, and attending his beasts, etc. But in a manner and from motives now wholly unknown to man. For all our labor is annoyance, but all Adam's labor was the highest pleasure, a pleasure far exceeding all the ease that is now known."<sup>67</sup>

Our experience of work is now a far cry from Adam's experience prior to his disobedience. The impact of human sin is evident in workers and workplaces in a number of ways. Contemporary scholar Miroslav Volf claims there is a "general crisis of work

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on Genesis," in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 618, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT617.w.1.1.43\\_167&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT617.w.1.1.43_167&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on Genesis," in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 617, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT616.w.0.4.69\\_197&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT616.w.0.4.69_197&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

[which] frequently surfaces in the negative attitudes of workers toward their work” today.<sup>68</sup> The negative aspects of contemporary work include exploitation of vulnerable workers including children, repetitive work, dehumanizing work conditions, technological displacement of work and workers, ecological damage, unemployment and more. Volf faults corrupt, greedy, and unscrupulous management, as well as behaviors of workers themselves and structural causes stemming from what he calls “the economic game” which is driven by the ultimate goal of maximizing profit.<sup>69</sup> Here he echoes Luther, who writes, “as all the other calamities of life remind us of sin and the wrath of God, so our labor and all our difficulty in procuring food ought to remind us of sin also and drive us to repentance.”<sup>70</sup>

Below I critique Volf’s perspective on work as reductionist in its overly narrow focus on its potentially negative aspects for workers and workplace environments. Here, I simply observe that Volf writes at a time of substantial technological change and economic disruption following the stock market crash of the late 1980s. Volf wrote before contemporary trends toward a more egalitarian, team-oriented and participative style of management, as well as the development among corporate leaders of an emphasis on accountability to a broader range of constituencies that include the well-being of the environment, suppliers and their communities, and workers. These developments reflect generational differences in experience and attitudes, especially with the ascent to corporate leadership of Millennials and their younger siblings, Generation Z.<sup>71</sup> These

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<sup>68</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 35ff.

<sup>69</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 42-5.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Luther, “Commentary on Genesis,” in *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 617, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT616.w.0.4.69\\_197&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT616.w.0.4.69_197&hl=en), accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>71</sup> Haydn Shaw, *Sticking Points: How to Get 4 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 123ff. For the trend toward team-based



developments are also evidence that, even though the divine image with which God imprinted humankind is beyond our conception since our divine nature is so deformed, we nevertheless retain at least some capacity for redemption which is experienced in the work of humankind. Luther writes, “Adam was made capable of life eternal. For he was so created that as long as he lived in this corporeal life, he might cultivate the earth not as doing a work of trouble, nor as wearying his body with labor, but as enjoying an employment of the highest pleasure; not as ‘deceiving or killing time,’ as we say, but as performing a service to God and yielding an obedience to his will.”<sup>72</sup> Yet even in humankind’s fallen state, the cultivation of land, which had become so onerous because of Adam’s sin, retains a remnant of its prelapsarian enjoyment and beauty. “Even as now, in the present state of the misery of nature, if anyone has a productive garden, neither digging nor sewing nor planting is a labor, but a certain devoted employment and a delight,” adding, “we may reflect with profit that man was not created to idleness, but to labor; no, not even in the state of primitive innocence.”<sup>73</sup>

Finally, Luther was also careful to reject any notion that vocation or good works of any kind are a means to salvation. For Luther, there is a strict dichotomy of the earthly kingdom, where the law rules, and the heavenly kingdom where Christ’s gospel rules.

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management, see Martha Lagace, “The Key to Managing Stars? Think Team” in Working Knowledge: Business Research for Business Leaders (Harvard Business Review, May 14, 2007), <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-key-to-managing-stars-think-team>, accessed February 13, 2024. For trends in business leaders focusing on issues beyond profits and shareholder return, see for example Talal Rafi, “Why Corporate Strategies Should Be Focused on Sustainability” in Forbes Small Business February 10, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/02/10/why-corporate-strategies-should-be-focused-on-sustainability/?sh=66e4e2877e9f>, accessed February 13, 2024.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Luther, “Commentary on Genesis,” in *The Complete Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), 606, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT604.w.0.6.73\\_129&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT604.w.0.6.73_129&hl=en), accessed January 7, 2024.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Luther, “Commentary on Genesis,” in *The Complete Works of Martin Luther*, (Google DigiCat, 2022), (Google DigiCat, 2022), 632. [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT631.w.2.4.4\\_310&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-y-cEAAAQBAJ&pg=GBS.PT631.w.2.4.4_310&hl=en), accessed January 8, 2024.

Vocation belongs exclusively to the earthly realm as God's downward-reaching work to continue creation through humanity. It is never a means of forgiveness in God's eyes, contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, because God has no need of our good works while our neighbor does.<sup>74</sup>

*(iii) Miroslav Volf on Vocation*

More recent Reformed theologians have revisited Luther's understanding of vocation with particular application to work. One of the most prominent is Miroslav Volf, who studied under Jurgen Moltmann and dedicated much of his academic research and writing to the relationship of faith and economics, work that is frequently cited by others. In his 1991 book, *Work in the Spirit*, Miroslav Volf offers one of the first scholarly attempts of the modern era to articulate a developed Protestant theology of work. Citing the works of 18<sup>th</sup> century liberal philosopher Adam Smith and the 19<sup>th</sup> century socialist philosopher Karl Marx, Volf builds on Luther's conception of the nature and experience of postlapsarian work as an annoyance. Volf claims that work for the typical laborer at all levels has become alienating and dehumanizing, a result of the introduction of industrialization. Volf expresses amazement that the church has been largely silent on the subject. He writes, "Given the paramount importance of work in both liberal and socialist economic and social theory, it is remarkable that, in our world dominated by work, a serious crisis in work had to strike before church bodies paid much attention to the problem of human work."<sup>75</sup> He blames theologians for this negligence, an astounding omission when one considers how much of our time is consumed by work.

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<sup>74</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 10-11.

<sup>75</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 69.

Volf offered a new and innovative theology of work grounded in his “elevation of gifts and eschatology as a fresh way of understanding our relationship to work.”<sup>76</sup> Volf describes his goal as seeking to develop a pneumatological and eschatological theology of work that “seeks to understand work as active anticipation of the transformation mundi.”<sup>77</sup> The need arises because “The dominant paradigm for understanding work in Protestant theology is inadequate.”<sup>78</sup> Volf claims that the Reformed tradition has been too focused on scripture and interprets scripture too narrowly. For him, scripture is an insufficient resource. First, it fails to affirm the fundamental meaning of work and, second, the nature of work has changed dramatically since biblical times. In Volf’s view, not only is there a scarcity of biblical passages addressing work, but the Reformers’ interpretations of key passages pertaining to vocation are both ambiguous and inaccurate.<sup>79</sup> Volf seeks to expand the salvific work of the Spirit to include the bodily existence of humankind – and of human workers specifically – which he claims Protestant thinkers have ignored since the Reformation. Volf’s pneumatological theology proposes to correct Luther and his Reformed followers who, in Volf’s view, confined salvation to the human spirit. Volf’s proposed theology would extend the Spirit’s work of salvation to include “the mundane work of human beings” and, indeed, the whole of reality and its renewal at the eschaton.<sup>80</sup> Critiquing Luther, Volf argues that the realm of the Spirit of the new creation cannot be restricted to the “inner man” as Luther claims, because the Spirit’s sphere of operation encompasses the whole of creation and therefore

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<sup>76</sup> Miller, *God at Work*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 102.

<sup>78</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 76.

<sup>79</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 77-78.

<sup>80</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 102-3.

the Spirit is not only the Spirit of religious experience but also the Spirit of worldly engagement. For this reason, it is appropriate and necessary to connect the Spirit of God with work. As he writes, “an adequate understanding of human work will be hardly possible without recourse to pneumatology.”<sup>81</sup>

In critical dialogue with Luther’s doctrine of vocation, Volf proceeds deductively, working from a theological framework of New Creation which is fundamentally eschatological. Volf sees hints of such an eschatological framework in Luther’s commentary on I Peter 4:10 in which Luther references Romans 12:4-5 and I Corinthians 12:12, saying “Behold, here St. Peter says that graces and gifts of God are not of one but of varied kind. Each one should understand what his gift is and practice it and so be of use to others.”<sup>82</sup> Volf hopes to overcome what he sees as the serious limitations of Luther’s doctrine of vocation in terms of its applicability to modern work and its plausibility as a theology. Luther’s notion of vocation, Volf claims, is not only “indifferent toward alienation in work,” but it also creates a potentially dangerous ambiguity and possible existential conflict between an internal spiritual calling and one’s external calling.<sup>83</sup>

Further, Volf critiques what he sees as Luther’s identification of calling with occupation. This is especially problematic when one’s work is dehumanizing and alienating, as Volf deems most work to be. Volf also critiques what he sees as Luther’s failure to address the dynamic nature of modern work in a technological, information-based society and the multiple jobs it often entails, either simultaneously or sequentially.

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<sup>81</sup> Volf *Work in the Spirit*, 104.

<sup>82</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 104, citing Luther WA,10, I, 311.

<sup>83</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 107-8.

Volf cites the inevitable reduction of vocation to gainful employment which is then elevated to religious status, veering toward idolatry.<sup>84</sup> Volf proposes that the Pauline notion of charism / charisma is a superior foundation for a theology of work “that is both faithful to the divine revelation and relevant to the modern world of work.”<sup>85</sup> Throughout, Volf underscores his central theme: Christian life is life lived in the Spirit of the new creation which determines the whole of life and therefore, “Christian work must ... be done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in the light of the coming new creation.”<sup>86</sup> Specifically, all humankind are given gifts of the Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit, and given tasks which are performed by the Spirit and, in cooperation with God, work for the transformation of the world to become more and more like the Kingdom of God. As Volf asserts, “All human work, however, complicated or simple, is made possible by the operation of the Spirit of God in in the working person; and all work whose nature and results reflect the values of the new creation is accomplished under instruction and inspiration of the Spirit of God.”<sup>87</sup>

One of the great strengths of Volf’s theology of work is its innovative and powerful emphasis on the role of the Spirit in anticipating the coming of the Kingdom of God at the Eschaton. For Volf, the Kingdom was inaugurated in Jesus’ earthly presence and the Spirit continues to work in all phases of human existence to make earthly reality more like the Kingdom to come. This includes work and workplaces, where the Spirit makes the Kingdom of God visible, if only partially. Volf emphasizes that work can and should point to the full realization of the Kingdom which Christ will bring with him when

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<sup>84</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 109.

<sup>85</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 110.

<sup>86</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 79.

<sup>87</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 114.

he returns at the end of time. As Volf notes, “Without the Spirit there is no experience of the new creation! A theology of work that seeks to understand work as active anticipation of the *transformation mundi* must, *therefore be a pneumatological* theology of work.”<sup>88</sup>

In light of such a bold and innovative theological move, it is striking that Volf regards work as something more likely to be joyless and life-draining than joyful and fulfilling. Drawing on Adam Smith and Karl Marx, Volf accepts their claims that alienation, far from being occasional and scarce among workers, is a condition experienced by most workers most of the time.<sup>89</sup> For all his emphasis on the transformative power and presence of the Holy Spirit in his proposed pneumatological model of vocation, Volf seems to have a remarkably limited vision of its activity for both lower level workers and the management structures that he blames for the plight of ordinary workers. Even as he highlights the New Creation as the goal of his theology of work, he fails to make the distinction that Martin Luther makes between the pre- and postlapsarian experience of work and thus fails to see in the New Creation the realization of the promise of God’s original creation. Volf admits that the doctrine of creation is essential to a theology of work, but he assumes that the doctrine involves “a mere restoration of the first creation” and is therefore “an insufficient basis for developing a theology of work.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 102-3. Although the argument is beyond the scope of this project, Volf critiques Luther for what Volf sees as Luther’s “exclusion of the human body and materiality in general from the sphere of salvation,” an error which Volf sees permeating all of Protestant theology. By contrast, Volf grounds his pneumatological theology of work in the soteriological assumption that the Spirit can and will redeem all creation, and indeed the whole of reality. While Charles does not dispute this, he vigorously disputes Volf’s interpretation of Luther’s soteriology.

<sup>89</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 54, 64.

<sup>90</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 101.

(iv) *J. Daryl Charles on Vocation*

In “Our Secular Vocation: Rethinking the Church’s Calling to the Marketplace,” published within the past year, scholar J. Daryl Charles offers a more contemporary view of the Reformed understanding of vocation and the theology of work. Like Volf, Charles bemoans the tragic paucity of theological reflection on vocation and work, evidence of the urgent need for “a new Reformation ... in the church’s understanding of human labor, of vocation, and of the significance of our social presence in the marketplace,” an understanding which is key to the church’s continued reform.<sup>91</sup> Affirming Luther’s notion of the Priesthood of All Believers, Charles writes, “It cannot be overstated how important that breakthrough was, both for the church in Martin Luther’s day and for the church of any era,” and yet, as he notes, “evidence of the centrality of the doctrine of vocation is almost nowhere to be found in the teaching offered by the Christian church.”<sup>92</sup> In Charles’ view, the marketplace is the sphere of life which offers the greatest opportunity for Christ’s witnesses to impact society. The opportunity for witness in the workplace goes mostly begging, however. Charles attributes this to two primary factors, the persistent perception that secular callings are inferior to spiritual callings, and what David Miller, in his landmark study of the Faith at Work movement, calls a “strongly antibusiness, anti-capitalist mindset” within both the church and academic institutions, including seminaries.<sup>93</sup> As a result, there have been only periodic references to vocation and work in academic literature, despite a deluge over the past 30 years of trendy self-

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<sup>91</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 33.

<sup>92</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 29, 50.

<sup>93</sup> Miller, *God at Work*, 91, 93, 97, 99. This has been my experience as well. As a worshipper, I can count on one hand the number of references made to work in sermons I have heard or any other element of the liturgy. As a pastor and worship leader, I recognize this neglect in my own preaching and praying, sadly.

help books written from a faith perspective.<sup>94</sup> The first modern attempt at a theology of work was not published until the 1950s, with little fanfare and no lasting impact.<sup>95</sup> In 1985, Jurgen Moltmann offered his insight that vocation is “the third great insight of the Lutheran Reformation,” after worship and sacrament.<sup>96</sup> Over the past 30 years, other scholars have also cited the dearth of theological reflection on Luther’s notion of vocation and work, noting that vocation is the second greatest emphasis in Luther’s writings, after justification by faith.<sup>97</sup> Charles concludes, “In few (if any) areas of Christian doctrine and conviction has there been another example in which the Christian church has largely gotten it wrong for over a millennium as it did work and vocation.”<sup>98</sup>

Charles describes the resulting crisis for workers who fail to perceive their work as more than a means of supporting themselves and their families. This distorted view among Christians is the cause of great discontent, frustration and even alienation, as well as the dangerous tendency to place our identities in our profession and the temptation to make idols of material things and other supposed markers of success. He writes, “The tragic reality is that few people see their daily work as connected to the purposes of God and as a means by which to flourish.”<sup>99</sup> As proof, he cites a 2017 Gallup survey in which 70% of workers worldwide identify the absence of a sense of being called to the work

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<sup>94</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 50.

<sup>95</sup> See Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation* (New York: Harper, 1952), <https://archive.org/details/yourothervocation>, accessed April 24, 2024.

<sup>96</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, “Reformation and Revolution,” in Manfred Hoffman, ed., *Martin Luther and the Modern Mind*, Toronto Studies in Theology 22 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1985), 86.

<sup>97</sup> Kenneth A. Cherney, “Uncovering Our Calling: Luther’s Reformation Re-emphasis on Christian Vocation,” Symposium on Vocation (Mequon, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, September 18-19, 2006), 14-17, <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1042/CherneyVocation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>98</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 156.

<sup>99</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 59-60.



they do, suggesting that they are not flourishing.<sup>100</sup> Although that study places blame largely on poor and outdated management practices, the real problem as Charles sees it is work without purpose or meaning.

In developing his argument for reclaiming the power of Luther's sense of vocation and work to rectify the crisis so many workers face, Charles critiques Volf and other eminent theologians, including Stanley Hauerwas and Karl Barth, all of whom hold "the mistaken view that work is a necessary evil."<sup>101</sup> Charles identifies Volf's criticism of the Lutheran understanding of vocation as "perhaps the most vigorous opposition to Luther's accent on vocation."<sup>102</sup> In contrast to Volf's critical reading of Luther, which deems Luther's understanding of vocation and work insufficient to support a new theology of work for our modern context 500 years removed, Charles claims that Luther's understanding of vocation and work is "theologically grounded and at the same time diverse and integrated, suggesting extended application outside of Luther's own context."<sup>103</sup> In Charles' view, Volf and others misconstrue the traditional Protestant doctrines of vocation and creation, and the critical connection between the two. Charles writes, "The Achilles heel of Volf's position is twofold: (1) its failure to ground vocation in creation, and hence design, and (2) the fact that it limits – if it does not reject – the possibility of redemption operating on this side of the eschaton."<sup>104</sup> In Charles' view,

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<sup>100</sup> Jim Clifton, "The World's Broken Workplace", (Washington DC: Gallup, Inc., 2017) <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/chairman/212045/world-broken-workplace.aspx>, accessed January 9, 2024.

<sup>101</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 71. It is interesting and illustrative of Charles' point that even such a well-respected scholar as Brueggemann tends in this direction in his commentary on Genesis, suggesting that work consists regularly and primarily of "our feverish activity of self-securing." He goes on to say that "Sabbath is the end of grasping and therefore the end of exploitation." See Brueggemann, 35.

<sup>102</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 168.

<sup>103</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 157.

<sup>104</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 74.

Volf's pneumatological theory of work rejects the "creation-oriented, vocation-centered understanding of work as the Reformers affirmed it," and thus restricts or even rejects outright the possibility of redemption in this life, a central element of the doctrine of common grace and providence.<sup>105</sup> Although it might be more accurate to say that Volf's view of the Spirit's restoration of creation is limited rather than an outright rejection, it is indeed curious that such a renowned theologian as Miroslav Volf, whose approach to a theology of vocation claims to be grounded in the work of the Spirit and the reality of the New Creation, dismisses the importance and unfathomable goodness of the original creation, an emphasis that is abundantly clear in Luther's Commentary on Genesis 1 - 3, especially with regard to the creation of humankind, as I have noted above.

Further, for all the importance Volf places on the work of the Spirit to bring forth the New Creation, he seemingly ignores its work in the present life. For this reason, Charles claims that Volf's eschatological perspective "tends to deny or ignore the incarnational reality of God's work in the present."<sup>106</sup> Charles calls Volf's mindset "fundamentally escapist in character" since its focus is so eschatological that "it severs any meaningful allegiance to the temporal order in the interest of remaining faithful to the heavenly (order)."<sup>107</sup> Volf's "unbalanced eschatology places an unhealthy focus on our removal from creation," thus abdicating any responsibility to humanity. What is needed, in Charles view, is a healthy, balanced eschatology that holds the temporal and the eternal in proper tension. This balanced eschatological understanding is critical to the Reformed understanding of vocation in which "our work, which expresses itself in and through our

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<sup>105</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 73.

<sup>106</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 76.

<sup>107</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 82.

individual callings, serves as a vehicle through which we can bring redemption to the world in ways social, cultural, and spiritual,” especially in our work setting which “is by far the widest realm in which our witness will be felt.”<sup>108</sup>

In proposing a reclamation of Luther’s theology of vocation and work, Charles’ premise is the affirmation of Luther’s understanding of the Priesthood of All Believers. Charles emphasizes that the nature of the secular and ordinary work we do is potentially sacred and holy so long as we understand it as Luther does. This requires that we embrace the central doctrine of creation in which the Reformed notion of vocation is rooted. As Luther makes clear, and Genesis 1:27-31 affirms, humankind are wonderfully and marvelously made in the image of God. Relative to Luther, Charles places far less emphasis on the tarnishing and corruption of the *Imago Dei* humankind bear as the result of human disobedience. Yet, as I have noted above, even Luther affirms that humankind, along with all creation, is nevertheless capable of redemption and still retains a beautiful remnant of the divine image.

Charles also places greater emphasis than Luther on God’s work as the source of meaning and inspiration for our own work. Charles is emphatic that we work because God works and because God assigned humankind the task of being fruitful and multiplying in order to subdue the earth, to exercise dominion over every living thing. This God-given work did not end when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Genesis 3. When God issued the curse as one of the penalties for their disobedience, it was the ground that was cursed, not work itself. Work may have become more difficult, but it remains holy and good.<sup>109</sup> This is the source of the intrinsic dignity of work, which

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<sup>108</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 82, 89.

<sup>109</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 158.

extends to all legitimate work, defined as that which we perform to please and glorify God by stewarding creation, and which does not violate moral law. Charles goes on to assert that work is not only dignified, but doxological. Referencing Romans 12:1, Charles calls our work the living sacrifice of our material bodies and thus constitutes God-pleasing worship.

Like Luther, Charles draws on Paul's body metaphor to affirm that God assigns our vocations, gives us the various and diverse gifts to undertake them, and places us providentially in a specific setting to employ our gifts in order to continue his creative work in the world by working to meet the needs of our neighbors. All callings are of equal worth, and all legitimate work is "an extension and expression of God's work."<sup>110</sup> God's work is most powerfully apparent in the person, work, and ministry of Christ, and is intended for our salvation. As Charles emphasizes, our understanding of salvation is not only life lived eternally in God's constant presence after we die, but a life of human flourishing now, in the temporal world. Therefore, as Charles writes, if we truly believe that all things are subject to Christ as Colossians 1:15-20 affirms, then our goal - which is God's goal - is to help all humankind flourish in the here and now since Christians are responsible for all aspects of human culture, including work.<sup>111</sup>

Our present reality, however, is that there are many counterclaims to authority which defy Christ's rule over all things. As a result, we experience conflict and tension in all areas of life. This is true for workers as well as others. "In our work, at the job, in the marketplace, we are confronted with dilemmas and challenges that seem to contradict Christ's ownership of and Lordship over all creation." Charles cites Luther's strong and

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<sup>110</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 62.

<sup>111</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 25-6.

abiding concern for social welfare as well as the practical application of the Priesthood of All Believers, to affirm that faith working through love of one's neighbor can and must transform local structures, including those within the workplace. Over time, Christians faithfully fulfilling their neighbor-love and God-worship through their vocations can even reform "the entire social order" to make it more Kingdom-like. Charles concludes that "Christian vocation at the macro level, therefore, includes all aspects of the created order and all aspects of human cultural and social life. At the micro level it takes shape, in unique and wonderful ways and within the myriad contexts specific to individuals, through the offering of one's talents and gifts - indeed his or her everything - to the Lord of creation."<sup>112</sup> The effect on Christians of the reclamation of Luther's sense of vocation is increased confidence, inspiration and joy. It also enables contemporary Christians to overcome the crippling compartmentalization of faith so that they can experience work as God intended it to be experienced, as "a heavenly vocation and divine gift to be received with gratitude."<sup>113</sup>

In this chapter I have explored the biblical roots of the Reformed notion of vocation. I then traced Martin Luther's development of the concept of the Priesthood of All Believers and outlined the key elements of his understanding of vocation that emerged from it. I reviewed more recent theological reflection on the Reformed understanding of vocation, beginning with Miroslav Volf and his influential critique of Luther and his proposal of a pneumatological theology of vocation and work. I concluded with an examination of the more recent work of J. Daryl Charles, including his critique of Volf and affirmation of his proposal to reclaim Luther's concept of vocation. I also noted

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<sup>112</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 158, 161, 236.

<sup>113</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 162, 236.

Charles' addition of missional accents of his own to show how his proposal is capable of deepening the experience of Christians witnessing to Christ in the contemporary workplace, and even transforming the larger culture.

In Chapter 3, I will describe the structure of this research project, the resources on which I drew in undertaking it, the analysis I conducted on the resulting data, and the detailed learnings this produced, including the nine themes which emerged from it which reflect the biblical and Reformed theological understandings of vocation which I outlined above in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **Introduction**

The project involved the application of the Reformed understandings of vocation and work within the context of a cohort of employed members of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. The reason I am doing this project is to help cohort members find Christian meaning in the work they do and a greater sense of being Christ's witnesses in the workplace. The practical research undertaken in this project focused on understanding how my congregation members experience their faith at work, and whether their participation in a cohort of their peers in which I introduce Reformed understandings of vocation can increase their sense of being a faithful witness to Christ in their workplace. The biblical and theological understandings of vocation and work were explored with a focus on the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2, Paul's letters to the churches at Rome, Corinth and Colossae, and Martin Luther's understanding of the Priesthood of all believers and its subsequent engagement by contemporary Reformed scholars with particular emphasis on the work of Miroslav Volf and J. Daryl Charles. Numerous themes emerged from the analysis of the research results, which I explore in Part III of this chapter below.

#### **Project Overview**

The project sought to determine whether and how the application of the Reformed theological understandings of vocation within the context of a small group cohort of

employed members of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania help cohort members find Christian meaning in the work they do and a greater sense of being Christ's witnesses in the workplace. Material was delivered in the context of a 5-part small group course called "Faith and Work." The 5-part course was held on five consecutive Sundays from mid-October to Mid-November 2023 in the Session and Adult Sunday School room on the campus of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church where I have served as Senior Pastor and Head of Staff for the past eight years.

In early October, I recruited 12 participants directly from regular attendees at The Gathering worship service. In selecting participants, I attempted to form a diverse cohort in terms of age, gender, profession/industry, and length of work experience. My assumption was that by recruiting a demographically and vocationally diverse cohort of participants the research data would be richer, reflecting different work experiences which would stimulate robust discussion based on the variety of experiences. The results of the research would then be more helpful in answering the research question, and in suggesting further research avenues, as I note in chapter 4. My assumption proved to be correct. Each participant signed a consent form that described the class focus and disclosed that each class session would be recorded for later analysis, with surveys being administered at the first and fifth (final) session. The surveys were completed by hand. Because of other commitments, 8 of the 12 participants completed the initial survey, while all 12 completed the final survey. I created the initial survey questions and class content from my private research on Martin Luther and his development of the Priesthood of All Believers as the basis of the Reformed understanding of vocation, relevant scripture passages underlying his work on vocation, and the work of more



contemporary theologians who reflect on Luther's understanding of vocation and work and take it in new directions, as discussed in Chapter 2. Each class was audio-recorded, and recordings were later transcribed. The small group sessions, class transcripts, pre- and post-course surveys and written exercises were analyzed for data. Themes were identified and then grouped into broader categories relating to participants' understanding of their Christian witness at work. Using these categories and themes, an ethnography was written.

### **Project Implementation**

In planning, conducting and evaluating this project, I drew heavily on previous study with Dr Katie Cross, Christ's College Lecturer in Practical Theology at the University of Aberdeen, in her June 2021 Doctor of Ministry Course "Introduction to Research Methodology" offered in partnership between Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and University of Edinburgh New College.<sup>114</sup> I chose Ethnography as the primary methodology for this research because Ethnography offers a variety of strengths for Qualitative Researchers such as myself. The strengths of ethnography as a methodology include the depth of insight it affords, the flexibility of ethnographic research design, the immediacy of conducting research without delay, and the relatively low cost of engaging in it. In making this decision, I was influenced by Dr. Karen O'Reilly who writes, "Ethnography that pays attention to wider structures and the thoughts and feelings of agents, within the context of daily life and individual action, is an ideal approach to

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<sup>114</sup> The most helpful resources were John Swinton and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (London: SCM Press, 2016) and Karen O'Reilly. *Ethnographic Methods 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (London: Routledge, 2012). Of the two, I found O'Reilly more practical.

research the practice of social life.”<sup>115</sup> O’Reilly cites participant observation as the key component of Ethnography, writing, “If you take part in things, then everything you want to study becomes within easy reach ... But more than this, participation helps you to experience things as the insiders do and thus understand them better” in contrast to other methods of data-gathering in which the researcher is less engaged with those being studied.<sup>116</sup> Most important to me was the fact that Ethnography provides the researcher with a wealth of rich, multi-layered data allowing for deep insights and understanding. As O’Reilly also observes, “survey work can tell us much about the framework of the society we are interested in.” However, while surveys provide the skeleton of meaning,<sup>117</sup> participant observation and semi-structured interviews give the researcher the flesh and blood of deeper meaning and true insight. For this reason, I chose to use both methods in conducting this research.

I also drew on private study of Martin Luther’s writings on vocation, and my own study of the relevant Pauline biblical texts on which Luther draws, particularly in his postils. I expanded my pre-course research to include more recent theological examinations of Luther’s notion of vocation written by Gustaf Wingren, Miroslav Volf, Eugene Veith, and J. Daryl Charles, as I noted in the last chapter. To a substantial degree, my pre-course research, and motivation for selecting this topic for my project, included my own lived experience of mid-life vocational discernment which led me to transition from a 20-year career in sales and marketing in the media industry to pastoral ministry in the PC(USA). My previous graduate study in Marketing and the Management of

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<sup>115</sup> O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 13.

Organizations at Columbia Business School and my work experience in marketing were also of great value in this project. My graduate study in business gave me a solid theoretical and practical framework for understanding human attitudes, behaviors, and decisions regarding both economic consumption behavior and managerial practices as they affect the culture of organizations. Having worked in a managerial capacity in organizations ranging in size from start-ups to large DOW-component corporations, I was also able to bring to bear not only a variety of workplace experiences, but also the practical experience of conducting and evaluating market research, especially regarding focus groups.

I drew on my pre-course research and lived experience in developing and delivering the course material and creating and evaluating the surveys, all of which formed the biblical, theological, and practical basis for this project. Luther's notion of the Priesthood of all Believers and its implication for the holiness of ordinary work was important, as was J. Daryl Charles' affirmation of Lutheran vocational understanding as the area of greatest opportunity for contemporary Christians seeking to witness to Christ in and through the work they do.

The 5-part course itself was part of a larger church-wide small group initiative seeking to engage members in the life of the church, particularly busy younger members whose time is limited, whose lives are full, and who tend to be less engaged in the church than older demographic groups. The Faith at Work small group was advertised to the congregation in worship and in online, electronic, and printed communications. There were no responses to these general announcements, which was unsurprising as it is consistent with my past efforts to recruit participants in various congregational activities.

As a result, I recruited participants directly. To encourage the participation of younger families, I chose to hold the class immediately following the 11:00 am worship service in which most of our young families participate and I recruited participants directly from those who typically attend that worship service. I offered lunch and child care free of charge, which led to the participation of six younger members aged 40 and under.

Overall, the 12 participants ranged in age from 23 to 68. The average age of participants was 47, younger than the average of the congregation at large. I think this nevertheless gives me a good overview of the congregation's experiences in integrating faith and work. It may even strengthen the application of the research results to new initiatives reaching out to the growing number of young families in the community as I envision in Chapter 4. Participants included one young single adult, a young married couple without children, three parents of young children and 6 older adults, all married, including the parents of the youngest participant. All were actively working, which, in addition to the ability to participate, was as a criterion for recruitment.

I confirmed participation by sending out emails the week before the first class with a shortened description of the course, reiterating the course activities and requirements from the consent form. In advance of the first class, I created the initial survey to establish a baseline of participants' understandings of the nature of work and their sense of being Christ's disciples in their respective workplaces. I chose to wait to construct the final survey until I had a better sense of which questions would be pertinent and important based on the group discussions.

I created an outline for each class including one or two questions that would be the focus of that class. I then constructed the PowerPoint presentations for each class

based on that focus. The class topics and questions were as follows:

- Week 1: Priesthood of All Believers
  - Are all vocations potentially holy in God's eyes? What difference might it make if they are holy in our eyes, too?
  
- Week 2: Calling & Giftedness
  - How has God led (called) me to this work, and am I still called to this work?
  - What gifts has God given me to serve Christ at work?
  
- Week 3: Purpose of Vocation as serving Christ by serving our neighbors
  - How do I serve Christ at work?
  
- Week 4: Eschatological view of work as foreshadowing the Kingdom
  - Can the workplace model the Kingdom?
  
- Week 5: Wrap-up and overview
  - Complete survey – measure how perceptions have changed.

In the first class, and later for those who missed that class, consent forms were signed by all participants. An example of this form is included in the Appendix. The general format, with slight variations on the first and final class to accommodate the

administration of surveys, was lunch, discussion of the previous week's journal prompt and then presentation of new class content, concluding with an assignment for the coming week. The assignment portion of each class (what I called a journal prompt) was originally envisioned as an in-class journal exercise. This did not prove helpful for the group, however, since the class-time required to do this produced little in the way of deep reflection. It also meant less time for the discussion in which the reflection was deeper and the immediate input from others produced richer data. By consensus the in-class journaling was scrapped after the second class. It was replaced by the practice of journaling at home or simply making mental or written notes during the week and bringing those notes to class to prompt discussion. In week 2, the assignment given for discussion in Week 3 was a Skills Grid Exercise for the purpose of identifying individual gifts and this was turned in to me for analysis. This was a modified version of an exercise I had done 30 years before based on material from Right Associates, an outplacement firm which was helpful to both my wife and me as we embarked on career transitions. Though the degree of thoughtfulness and reflection varied, those who did complete it found this exercise useful in analyzing where their gifts and skills had produced success in the past and what this suggested about their current sense of being called to do the work they do. On Monday following each class, I forwarded the PowerPoint for the previous day's class to all participants, repeating in the email the assignment for the week and encouraging them to pray for themselves and each other.

Class attendance ranged from 8 to 12 participants and, over the course of the 5 sessions, all participants contributed to the class discussion. Classes were conducted in a relaxed style with participants seated around a rectangular table in an oblong room with a

projector and screen at one end. The class content was delivered through PowerPoint presentations and participants were receptive to the presentation of the material. The discussion was marked by informal congeniality, open and forthright sharing which included some very personal and sometimes painful stories, sympathetic and insightful reflection on each other's contributions, and frequently great humor. This was most evident in the discussion of giftedness and God's placement of participants in positions where those gifts would be uniquely valuable. For example, Darlene shared a painful story of having to do "the devil's work" of telling a foster couple that their foster child would be suddenly taken from them and moved out of state. Darlene then relayed that her knowledge of procedures, gained through experience which she alone had among all her peers, enabled her to guide the grieving foster couple to pursue their right of appeal. In response, Kathleen shared the experience that she and her husband Kevin who together had been foster parents undergoing a similarly painful removal of their foster child. In so doing, they reflected back to Darlene the value of her gifts and how she used them as "like seeing an angel in the wild." This prompted Daniel to reflect back to his wife Darlene the value of her detail-orientation and depth of knowledge, affirmation which was well-received by Darlene. A similar example of such open sharing and heartfelt affirmation occurred when Marilyn affirmed the importance of Sam's gift of learning to handle conflict so early in his career. It was also evident when Lucy reflected back to Marilyn that she could see God's hand in placing Marilyn in a position to work on a legal case she had worked on when she was on a different team. In my experience, the honest, heart-felt and supportive exchanges were consistent with character of The Gathering

worship service through which the class participants were already familiar with one another.

I recorded each class using the iPhone Voice Recorder utility on my cell phone. I then uploaded the recordings to an online transcription service called Otter.AI. After extensive editing of the recordings online to increase the accuracy and clarity of the transcript, I downloaded the transcripts to Microsoft Word. The total word count of the transcribed recordings came to just over 38,000. In late December 2023 and early January 2024, I reviewed the transcriptions again, making further clarifications and corrections by comparing the transcripts with the audio recordings. I formatted the page layout to make room in the margin for hand-written notes. I then reviewed each transcript yet again word for word and coded the responses for deeper analysis. I used the methodology of ethnography to identify specific themes roughly following the organization of the class content.

I shift now to describe the implementation of the two participant surveys. In creating the two surveys, I leaned on my graduate study and work experience in Market Research and statistics. The initial survey began with 7 questions asking participants about their experience of being a Christian at work, including their inner experience, experience with colleagues and the overall culture of their workplace. The next 8 questions asked them to consider their vocation in light of their faith. Topics in this second set of questions included the understanding of their work as holy, their gifts for performing the specific work they do, and their sense of meaning and purpose in doing it. The final survey followed a similar pattern with the addition of three questions at the end



asking participants to consider to what degree their participation in this small group did or did not increase their sense of being Christ's witnesses in their vocational work.

In evaluating the surveys, I recognized that the sample size was too small and selection criteria too narrow for there to be any possibility that statistical analysis would produce a valid representation of overall congregational attitudes and accordingly I made no attempt to produce that. Further, I was aware that my existing personal and pastoral relationships with all the participants could bias their responses since I was a participant as group organizer and facilitator. Because of this, I emphasized that survey responses would have zero impact on my own evaluation for this project. Nevertheless, with these caveats in mind, I knew from my previous study and experience in conducting ethnographic research, as well as market research in a professional capacity, that the depth of responses, and the interactive reflections of participants in a group setting would nevertheless provide rich data which could be combined with the survey responses to offer a directionally valid answer to the research question I was hoping to answer. Prior to the last class, I reviewed the list of questions from the initial survey and generated a revised list of questions for the final survey. In both instances I attempted to formulate questions using both positive and negative phrasing to encourage deeper consideration.

Of the original 15 survey questions, I repeated 8 in the final survey, which had a total of 13 questions. I used the same 5-point scale for these 8 questions on both the initial and final surveys so that comparing responses would allow me to measure changes in perceptions attributable to the course. Of the other 5 questions in the final survey, two were modifications of original questions, and 3 were new. The 3 new questions asked participants to indicate their perception of the impact of the 5-part Faith and Work course

on their understanding of vocation and work as Christian witness. At the end of both the initial and final surveys, I provided a prompt and space for an open-ended response.

These proved to be less helpful however as the responses were typically general summaries of deeper reflections on the same topic available in the transcriptions of class discussions. Following the completion of the course, I entered all the survey responses from each participant in both surveys into Microsoft Excel. For questions asking about the frequency of experience, I used the following a 5-point numerical scale:

- 1 represented Never
- 2 represented Rarely
- 3 represented Sometimes
- 4 represented Often
- 5 represented Always

For the other questions asking for level of agreement, I used a similar 5-point scale as follows:

- 1 represented Completely Disagree
- 2 represented Disagree Somewhat
- 3 represented Neutral or Not Sure
- 4 represented Agree Somewhat
- 5 represented Completely Agree

Having provided an outline of how the project was implemented, I will now turn to the results of the project.

### **Themes**

In this section, I will provide a summary and analysis of the findings from the research project, focusing first on the 5 class transcriptions and then incorporating the results of the initial and final surveys. Data analysis began with the transcription process. Having uploaded the 5 class audio recording files to an online transcription site called Otter.AI, I then reviewed each transcription word for word making corrections, as many were needed. That served as first read-through of the data. I then downloaded the files into Microsoft Word and made more corrections, going through the transcriptions word-for-word and reformatting the pages to leave room in the margins for making manual notes. I then read through the data a third time, circling words and phrases that seemed important to me in light of the research question and the theological and biblical basis for Reformed understandings of vocation that I analyzed in Chapter 2. I also made notes in the left-hand margin regarding possible themes. I then put the transcript away for a few weeks over Christmas. This delay worried me and made me a little anxious at the time, but it proved to be the right thing to do, both for my family and for the research project. When I came back to the Word transcripts after the New Year's holiday, I began to sort the key sentences into 9 themes roughly paralleling the content and sequence of the course materials presented. To get a sense of the relative importance of each theme, I created an Excel document to analyze the volume of words under each theme. I review those themes here and will group them into four broader categories in chapter 4. I

conclude this section with an analysis of the survey results and a summary. In discussing individual responses, I will preserve their anonymity by referring to them using pseudonyms.

*(i) Theme #1 - All have multiple vocations*

The concept of being called to vocations in different phases of life was not a new one for the group and, while it did not generate significant discussion, it was affirmed widely. Luther's understanding of vocation in three areas of life - personal life, including marriage and work, public life, including citizenship, and religious life, including Christian discipleship – however, seemed to be somewhat outdated and too narrow. Kathleen, for example, a working mother of two active young boys, expresses the difficulty of the multiple vocations God has placed on her life. This became clear when I used her as an example of someone with multiple vocations. I said, “Kathleen, I used you as an example. I'm sure I've missed some here. You're an engineer. You're an Elder, you're a wife, mother, parent, citizen, voter ... have I missed anything?” Kathleen responded, “No. And if it's not on that list I'm saying no to it.” Her comment was met with laughter around the room, but it would come up again in the context of how difficult it is, especially for women, to juggle all their vocations.

Lucy affirmed the conflict that women feel, including stress and guilt when the demands of their multiple vocations conflict and threaten to compromise the sense of fulfillment experienced in each vocation. Due to economic necessity, Lucy chose to work as a full-time teacher, as well as mother to her two children. She said, “As a woman who never had a choice to stay at home because of my husband's income, I was happy and fulfilled by my job. But I grieved every August when I had to go back to work, because I

felt I should be home too. How do you do both?” While her two children thrived, she said, “I think that's part of why there is such unhappiness [among workers, as described in a 2017 Gallup survey quoted in Class #2].<sup>118</sup> And I don't know if women here would agree, but that's a very tough decision.” The women in the group expressed a desire to focus on this issue in future small groups. Marilyn, an attorney and mother of three young children, responded, “I've had two long term jobs, but my main job is being a mom and my other job kind of supports that. I think we could have an entire small group on what Lucy raised. And we should. I think we should.”

*(ii) Theme #2: All morally valid vocations are holy – Priesthood of All Believers*

In response to a question “Are some callings, more holy than others?” Daniel, a former salesman for a large corporation and now an entrepreneur running his own business, says without a moment’s hesitation, “Absolutely ... in our day-to-day work, I may not be a minister by title, but as Christians, we are. And we all have, you know, our job to do as we're out there.” As was the case with Theme #1, the notion that all vocations are potentially holy did not come as a surprise to the group and did not generate much discussion. This point was confirmed in the results of the surveys as I describe below.

*(iii) Theme #3: Work has dignity and divine mandate –  
We can and should do very good work*

Excellence in work was an expectation and goal expressed by several participants on various occasions throughout the 5 course sessions. Interestingly, it was most often

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<sup>118</sup> Clifton, “The World’s Broken Workplace.”

phrased as an expectation that one has of oneself or one's team, and as a strong belief and component of one's character, rather than an expectation and goal that God sets for us and which God finds pleasing. Kathleen, an engineer for a state agency, said "I feel strongly about doing things right and well, you know, it's so easy to cut corners and do things the fast and easy way, when it's not better for everybody, and it's not better environmentally. You know, I'm in the midst of trying to redefine our program a little bit and modernize things, so ... There are a lot of obstacles for me to work against there. And it kind of gives me the drive to keep going." The notion of important work done well, was echoed by Kevin, Marilyn, and Darlene. Sam, a young adult in his mid-20s who is new to his job and recently took on a supervisory role for the first time in his career, expressed a similar thought when he described seizing an opportunity to do work in a better way at a regional transportation center. He said, "The standard operating procedure was in need of some twisting and turning, so I implemented a new maintenance SOP [Standard Operating Procedure]," despite the fact that "the shop itself doesn't really react well to change ... and usually, it's met with a lot of animosity. It's like, if it's not broke, don't fix it. But it's changing for the better. It just makes more sense to do this." Clearly doing good work well is important to all the participants. As with #2 above, the survey results suggest that they understand it as a significant aspect of their vocation, even if they do not use intentionally religious language to describe its origin in the work that God did and still does.

*(iv) Theme #4: God wants us to rejoice and thrive in our work –  
work should be joyous & fulfilling*

This theme was commonly expressed in terms of the joy and satisfaction that participants experience in work that they enjoy. In the first class, members described early jobs which gave them both joy and fulfillment. Daniel described his very first job working at Yankee Stadium one summer when he got to watch Reggie Jackson, a famous baseball star, every night. Kathleen also mentioned her favorite job was an early exposure to surveying and engineering which she described as “pounding stakes.” Currently held jobs are also sources of joy and fulfillment for participants. Daniel experience his work as a solo entrepreneur as a blessing which he loves, despite some ongoing stress. For Darlene, being able to make a difference gives meaning to her work which motivates her even if her work is only occasionally so joy-inducing. Steven and Christine also were effusive in stating how much they love their jobs. Several expressed a deep sense of gratitude to God for the work they get to do. Here, too, the survey affirmed the connection between fulfillment and joy in God-given work.

*(v) Theme #5: God chooses our vocation for us – listen for and follow  
God’s will in choosing a vocation*

The connection between one’s fundamental values and God’s direction in the formative experiences through which we discern the vocation God intends for us was the subject of some of the most powerful reflections in the group discussions. Sam cited the theme of being fundamentally just and fair, as well as God’s hand as the connecting thread between his academic pursuits and his early work experience that led him to his current work as a maintenance supervisor at a regional transit center. He said, “I’m a

maintenance supervisor over at [name of employer], and before that I was at the prison, and before that I majored in criminal justice. And so, trying to be fair and just has always been at the root of what I want to do in my life.” Sam described the mysterious and sometimes circuitous path on which God led him to his current position. Working in a prison proved not to be as fulfilling as he had expected, saying, “Eight months into it, I was like, you know what? Quarterlife crisis time! What am I doing with my life? And so, I went out and applied for jobs. I applied to be the transit safety ambassador [at his current employer], and then they're like, no, and they went with another person. How about maintenance supervisor? I never really saw myself as a maintenance guy. I have no (experience) for that. But it's God opening doors. This is crazy.”

Sam’s story prompted Darlene to relay her own story of vocational discernment as a family crisis in her home state in another part of the country set in motion a series of events through which she felt God moving in her life and that of her family, ultimately leading to her current job in a child welfare department of a local government agency. She said, “I remember praying, ‘What do you want me to do? What am I supposed to do here?’ You know, because everything was just kind of not working out the way we had planned.” She then powerfully described God’s answer to her prayer “when I distinctly heard the Holy Spirit speak to me ... Nobody else could hear it - but I heard it. I heard an audible voice. And I know it was the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit answered that prayer. And he said, ‘Wait’, and that was it. That was it! One word. I hate that. I HATE that. What do you mean ‘Wait’? But I heard it loud and clear. ‘Wait.’ Wait?” During that time, she was able to help alleviate a family crisis until her husband’s job transitioned unexpectedly to Mechanicsburg where “everything just kind of started rolling. Once we



moved up here, that's when the doors kind of opened” for Darlene’s career as well. This theme is closely related to the next theme which was by far the most prominent in our class discussions.

*(vi) Theme #6: God gives us various and diverse gifts to undertake our vocation and do our work*

The relationship of giftedness to vocation was a powerful theme in this research, covering interests and passions, as well as experience, skills and knowledge. For example, Kevin mentioned that his early passion for rollercoasters influenced his choice of career as a civil engineer. Darlene relayed how her knowledge and experience enabled her to help a foster family whose foster child was suddenly to be removed to a new family out of state. Darlene said, “I used to work with foster parents. I'm very familiar with the appeal rights that they have, and I was able to at least give her that little bit of hope” by coaching the grieving parents in requesting and preparing for a hearing to contest the decision. Reflecting on the experience, Darlene concluded that God had prepared her and placed her in that spot to offer hope to these foster parents, saying “I'm probably the only person in our agency who has the relevant experience.” Kathleen, herself a foster parent who, along with her husband Kevin, fostered a child who was removed to a distant relative, was able to reflect back to Darlene the impact that Darlene had, saying, “we've been on the opposite side of the table as the foster parents and it makes such a difference, not just to have somebody who knows the system and can actually give you advice ... even just feeling like there's someone on your team, or someone that's looking out for your kid makes a huge difference.” Kathleen concluded, “as a parent, when things are going badly, you feel like you suddenly are responsible for

being this kid's therapist and their lawyer and everything all at once. And to find someone who's willing to take time out of their day to help you is like seeing an angel in the wild. It really is." Darlene's husband, Daniel, affirmed that "God has given her a gift. She is very detail oriented. She's so knowledgeable," citing instances "where she's helped folks, because she knew she remembered this detail, or she remembered this law, and completely changed the direction of a kid's life. Because of this little thing that she remembered. It's a gift."

Daniel, the former salesman turned entrepreneur, went on to affirm that God has gifted him with the ability to listen actively and empathetically. He relayed the experience of servicing a product he installed at the rural home of an elderly couple. Daniel shared their disappointment that the expensive addition they built so that their adult child could come home and live with them would go unused because the child suddenly decided to live elsewhere. Daniel said, "I kind of have some empathy for folks that have adult children that come home. [laughter] So I just listened while she talked. And I really didn't say anything, you know, just nodded in agreement, like, hearing all these things, the frustration, and they really need the help around the house because they're in their 70s now and what are they going to do?" Daniel's gift of faith was also evident in this interaction. He said, "At the end of our conversation - which wasn't a conversation, again I was just listening - we both agreed all you can do is pray for your kids and leave it in God's hands." Daniel admitted that he didn't know what difference the interaction made but noted that "she had a smile on her face." As he reflected, "That's [the way with] most of my interactions that I have with people. If they talk, I listen. I don't know why, I guess I have a listening face." Pushed to say more, Daniel said, "a lot of my clients are older,

and oftentimes they're widows or things like that. They just talk to me. People are lonely." Others in the group reflected back to Daniel the importance of his gift of listening and its value in well-being and wholeness. Marilyn affirmed the value of the gift of listening, which she has experienced in her legal work. She spoke of the importance of providing an opportunity to be heard in the form of phone calls from professionals in various fields whose license she has been compelled to censure. She said, "If it's somebody who's in disagreement with a decision, and they're calling to appeal or complain or whatever, 90% of the time, it really makes an impact just to listen for 20 minutes to what they have to say, you know, respectfully and intently listen, and help as much as you can."

*(vii) Skills Grid Exercise*

In preparation for Week 3 of the Faith and Work Small Group, participants were asked to complete an exercise to identify their primary skills. The exercise involved creating a grid. They were to list their 5 – 10 most successful endeavors down the vertical side of the grid and, for each one, they were to list the skills that were most important to the success of that endeavor across the top of the grid. For each skill, they were to tally at the bottom of the column how often that skill was cited, and then to rank the skills on that number. The purpose of the exercise was to help each participant determine her/his primary gifts and to discern whether they are still called to their vocation based on the degree to which those gifts are still useful in their current work. All 8 participants completed the assignment. Some were little more than a few sentences or notes. Others were done in detail and entered onto graph paper for organization and analysis. The

responses to the question of whether they are still called to the work they do ranged from a definitive yes to a tentative maybe. No one expressed dissatisfaction with their current vocation based on this exercise. The real value of the exercise became apparent as a prompt to the group discussion which followed, and which I highlight here.

In response to the Skills Grid Exercise described above, Sam, a 23-year-old maintenance supervisor for a regional transit company, took a narrative rather than graphical approach. He began by analyzing his current position, a job he has held for less than a year and which requires him to supervise mechanics and service staff, all of whom are older and more experienced than he. Sam identified teaching and implementation as the skills that he saw in himself as he undertook the difficult work of change. He then relayed a harrowing story of his brief time working as a prison guard. When he took the job, it appeared to be the culmination of his collegiate ambition developed by studying Criminal Justice. He changed his mind, however, following an interaction with a suicidal inmate who smeared feces all over his cell as a form of protest to the constant interruption of his sleep by guards checking on him every ten minutes. In successfully dealing with this challenging situation, Sam identified his ability to establish rapport and gain trust with the troubled inmate in order to reason with him. Sam said, “So what I did was I talked to him, and said like, ‘Hey, dude, why do you do this?’ You know, a good baseline ... I tried to build a connection, build a rapport with the guy. I said ‘Listen, man, this isn't good for you, and it's not good for me. So, let's do ourselves both a favor and let's get this cell clean,’” which slowly but surely happened. In this example, Sam also identified the ability to gain trust as one of his most important gifts, saying “a work

relationship depends on whether you trust that person, if you have that relationship with them.”

Sam relayed another professional success that illustrated the importance of his God-given gift of dealing with conflict, this based on having to discipline and ultimately fire a co-worker who engaged in fraud. He said, “That taught me about confrontation, and how sometimes it's really uncomfortable. And I was very uncomfortable in that situation. But at the same time, it's a necessary part of life, confronting people on their actions.” A further example illustrated his ability to help others resolve conflict. “A big part of my job is settling disputes,” Sam said, “And I don't really like it because I kind of equate it to being childish, but at the same time, we're all humans and people just don't agree with each other, and so they come to me.” He said, “You guys are both in your 50s. You guys have had time to understand that you guys may not like each other, but you're part of a team, and you gotta work together, even if you don't like each other.” The skills that Sam developed at such a young age were affirmed by other group participants. Marilyn said, it's very positive that you already developed a skill set at the beginning of your career, and it's going to be something you're going to use your whole life.”

Lucy also shared her responses to the Skills Grid Exercise. In sharing her experience decades before as a recent college-graduate trying to land her first job in teaching at a time when applicants far outnumbered open positions, Lucy named organization as her most important skill which she developed years before as a 15-year-old Sunday School teacher. Reflecting back on that experience, she said, “I always knew I wanted to be a teacher through experiences I had that were very successful in working with children ... never had [the elderly ladies who ran the Sunday School] let a 15-year-

old be in charge of the Sunday school, but I did it. It was second nature.” She credited that and similar experience as a counselor at day camps, for developing “a broad knowledge base which always helps in teaching, and communication skills, which were nerve wracking, because you have to sell yourself. But it's so important that you do that, because even though inside you're cringing, you have to be able to tell them how good you are, and that they would want you instead of the others.” She went on to cite prayerful persistence, determination, and resilience as key gifts essential to her 6-year-long effort to get hired in a new school district. She said, “It was a lot of character building, taking those ‘nos’ and saying [to God] ‘I know I'm supposed to be a teacher. You've got to open the door for me somewhere. And you know from our conversations, you know this [her current, less desirable teaching position] isn't where I'm supposed to be for the next 35 years!’” Asked to reflect on what God might have been doing while her prayers went unanswered for so long, Lucy said, “He taught me patience. Because at the same time, I was waiting for the perfect job. I was waiting for the perfect husband. And it was like, you're not opening doors on any field here. Let's get this rolling! So it was, there was determination. And I really had to believe in myself, as well as convincing other people to believe in me.” Lucy reasoned with God, saying, ‘You would not have given me these strengths, you would not have given me these interests, if I was not to use them.’ So it was a lot of wrestling.”

Christine also saw that God has given her the gifts to perform her work as a pet-minder, work that she loves. She says, “God has certainly given me the gifts to be able to be in this line of work, you've got to be patient, because, just like us, the animals have off days. And, you know, they're just like us, they have such big personalities.” She also sees

in herself other God-given gifts that make her well-suited to her vocation. She says, “for me, this business is really all about trust. They need to trust me. That's a huge thing for me because I pride myself on being a very trustworthy, reliable person. I take that very, very seriously.” Compassion is another of the God-given gifts that Christine sees in herself which are essential to her vocation. She says, “I gotta care for them sometimes when they're sick. So that can be a little nerve wracking because I don't want to mess anything up. I, you know, because as much as I treat them as if they're my own, I have to keep in the back of my mind, like, you're in my care. Nothing can happen to those guys when they're in my care. So, God definitely gives me the patience and the compassion, to be able to do what I do.”

Kathleen also sees gifts in herself that enable her to do the work required by being in what she calls “an unenviable position.” Projects which were designed 30 years before now must be rebuilt because their designs are no longer acceptable.” What complicates her job is that the people who designed those projects are now in more senior positions above her and she needs their cooperation and help. Kathleen demonstrates both her people skills and her compassion when she says, “we're having to go back and redesign things and it's not fun, but at the same time, you know, I have to be kind to the people who did it because they were just doing what their bosses told them. Back when they did these designs, they only had, like, three years of experience and had to rely on the people above them.” She adds that a difficult part of her task is “finding ways to make it not personal, because it's not that they did it wrong. It's just that they did it in the 90s and never revisited it. It's not their fault. It's not anybody's fault. I just want it to be done. Right.”

*(viii) Theme #7: God works through our vocations – God places us in jobs where he wants us to serve others*

Another prominent theme that developed in the group discussions was the perception that God, in addition to guiding participants to particular vocations and gifting them to work in that vocation, also guides them to specific jobs at specific times in order to serve others. This process often seemed mysterious as it unfolded, but remarkably clear in hindsight. Darlene said, “I actually got my job by accident. . . I thought I was applying for another [position] with [another department]. But then I realized that I applied for the one with [her current department] and thought well, I’ll do that, too. So, I went and took the test and, thanks to all the very good teachers I had growing up in [her home state], my test scores were really high. I shocked myself.” When she got the job offer for the position she had not intended to apply for, she took it, understanding that God had been at work in her life. She has worked in this position for the past 14 years and is very happy and fulfilled, using the majority of her most important gifts to be successful. The episode I described in Theme #6 above regarding the help she was able to provide to grieving foster parents is an example of this.

Steven responded to Darlene’s story by relaying a painful experience of testing that confirmed his present vocation and workplace, while teaching him to be patient and rely on God. Steven works in inbound telephone sales for a truck rental company, a position he has held for the past 19 years, during which time he has been able to achieve a very desirable balance between working from home and being present for his family, Steven says, “It’s been good. But there have been times where I would say I had to swallow my pride a little bit because [God] throws me a curveball.” His supervisor



informed him one day that he would need to work at a location 45-minutes away in an office where he felt micro-managed. Further, his new hours would interfere with his ability to be present for dinner with his family. Steven said, “I was not a happy camper. I cried, and I thought, you know, how dare they do this? And my kids saw that I cried, and my wife saw me cry. And I don't cry.” He prayed, “God, this is ridiculous. Why?” And I didn't always get the answer I was looking for. It was just ‘Be patient. Be patient.’ It's just for a time.” Finally, Steven was allowed to resume working from home. With a new sense of humility and greater appreciation for the gift of being able to work from home, Steven saw this experience as a test which confirmed him in his sense of vocation and strengthened his gratitude for God's providence. He said, “This is where I belong. And I just had an amazing [sales] race in October ... And I owe it all to God, and I owe it to my family.” Steven sees that he is precisely where God intends him to be so that he can serve the needs of his customers and his family.

Marilyn went on to cite an example from her legal work underscoring the unique preparation to handle a case that she was assigned. “And I know with 100% certainty, I mean, I believe I handled it correctly. But I also believe no one else on my team would have, would have gotten discipline on this guy's license for it, because it was a little bit challenging, and it was just kind of different.” During further discussion, Marilyn revealed that she had worked on this case for more than 2 years when she was a member of different team. After she transferred to her present team, she got the case back. Reflecting on Marilyn's story, Lucy said, “I think I see God's hand in that. If you switched teams and yet you still got that case, he knew you would take care of it. And it needed to be taken care of. Whereas you said some of your colleagues wouldn't have

done that. I would interpret that as God really speaking to me and saying, I laid this on your desk and on your heart for a reason.” Kathleen shared her efforts to modernize her department’s design process which “is stuck in the ‘90s, and it’s weird and gross. I don’t like it at all and I’m gonna have to fight a lot to get it changed. And I came in at just the right time” to do it, since staff turnover will give her “a good opportunity for me to train up a bunch of people in doing it right.” What was striking to Kathleen was the match between her experience at an external engineering consulting firm, her determination to do good work well, and the opportunity to effect positive change. She said, “I can see where I have a very specific skill set that is going to be such an asset to making things better whether they like it or not ... I feel like I'm in a spot where there are not many people who could do what I am trying to do. That's kind of made it worth the pay cut, and the less flexible hours.”

*(ix) Theme #8 The purpose of our vocation – serve others as Christ did, to help them flourish.*

The group discussions also developed a theme of the purpose of vocation as serving Christ by serving others, even when there is pressure to ignore their needs. For Kevin, a civil engineer for a private engineering firm, says, “it comes down to doing the right thing. And one of the hardest things that we do is right-of-way acquisition, going up to someone and saying, ‘We need your house, we need your land...’ We work with other people to do it, but we work to justify it. We make sure that they are taken care of.” Kevin goes on to describe a situation of working with someone with special needs whose support system is located near his current home form which he must move, and then

standing up for them in the face of a demanding client who wants the land immediately. For Kevin the right thing to do was to tell the client, “‘No, we're going to do the right thing. This is where all his support system is.’ And just looking out for people who can't look out for themselves. The hard part is telling the client no. Jimmy has to stay here, somewhere nearby and we'll figure it out.” Kathleen concurs, saying, “Yeah, it's so easy to just say we don't have the money to do that, or it's just too complicated to do that when the right thing to do is to listen to what people need and make it happen.” Marilyn says in response to Kevin and Kathleen, “what jumps to mind is kind of what something that Kevin said, like doing the right thing. And I mean, that has always been 100% clear, like ever since I started as a prosecutor, like sometimes the right thing is to dismiss the case or to, you know, give them a good deal, because there's x, y, & z going on in the person's life. But sometimes the right thing is, of course not to do that, you know, to try to prosecute something to the fullest. So, I just think it's important to be a fair person. I do see that is related to my faith.”

Lucy shares a story about the need for empathetic service to those in need whom she serves. As an employee at a secular community college, she is reluctant to share faith verbally, not knowing how it would be received. Instead, she focuses on serving others as she perceives Christ would. She says, “I don't think some of them ever had a parent help them or support them in, in anything that had to do with school, much less get an assignment done on time. So, to bring those ideas to the forefront with them, nothing on that syllabus is optional. You must do it. All those due dates are there, and you've got to plan your life around that because they're not going to move. And let's study together, or you send me your paper and I will proofread it for you. That's foreign to some of them.

So, to be that example, and be of service to them, is how I think that I reach them the best.” She, too, balances discipline with empathy, holding firm to the deadlines while also providing help to meet them.

Sharon is an insurance claims adjustor. She describes a similar challenge of maintaining the necessary balance between compassion and being firm about accountability. She says, “you have a lot of malarkey, tom foolery with this job. So, it's good [when] I help people. If they have a legitimate injury, I have a checkbook, I can make things happen that they need. But you can't just let everybody walk all over you. So, it's like a tightrope, doing God's work, because you want to help but you don't want to get taken advantage of.” Sharon continues, saying, “When I'm dealing with my - I call them claimants, you can call them clients - they're in my life for a year or two. Then probably, their claim gets settled and they go on. Because each of them has very unique needs, and they depend on me, whether it's to get their check out in time, or too, if they want to see a certain doctor, I don't necessarily need to let them, I have that power. But understanding the situation, like a female might only want to see a female doctor, or even when we connect them with psychologists and psychiatrists, there's very unique needs with that. And that's where I can apply what I'm learning here each week.”

Paul, in reviewing what he calls his four separate careers, beginning with the US Air Force, then working with two federal agencies and finally as a local bus driver, sees two themes weaving their way through his careers, “serving other people in some capacity and, and treating other people like, I think, Jesus would treat them.” Christine, who has her own business as a pet-minder, has a clear sense of the service she provides her customers, and the fulfillment she derives from that service to her neighbor. She says,

“I feel great knowing that I’m able to help them with their fur babies.” Asked to describe his experience of being more intentional about serving Christ by serving others at work, Finn, a nurse for 14 years, said, “I do remember feeling a bit more nervous than normal, because I perceived it as a big responsibility to be working as God's hands to take care of these patients. So, it put me off my game, in all honesty. And that's not what I expected.” Sensing that he had become “a little too comfortable” with his care for patients, Finn found that being more intentional “allowed me to take it more seriously. Keeping Christ in mind that, I'm not just going to joke around with my patients. I’ve got a pretty serious job to do. Again, keeping Christ in mind, it allowed me to do that, and I have to say, though, it, it kind of made the whole experience more rewarding. It allowed me to be more present when I was taking care of these patients.” For Finn, that change of mindset was also the impetus for a deeper relationship with his patients. He said, “It allowed me to remember, hey, let's talk a little more, let me get to know this guy a little more. You know, what's going on, why he's here. And what's gone on in his life. So, it allowed me to be more present. And, again, it’s more rewarding.”

*(x) Theme #9: Work should point to the Kingdom –  
witnessing to Christ changes workplace and world*

In group discussion, participants often referenced aspects of their work and workplace that are in alignment with the values and characteristics of the Kingdom of God, but without making that direct connection or using Kingdom language to describe them. This came up frequently in relation to leadership practices of participants who supervise others at work. Kathleen, who manages two other employees at her government agency sees that serving others extends to co-workers who are direct reports whose needs

she serves by employing good management practices. She says, “I had a moment in our workload meeting where one of my employees had gone through something that was really old and found something that he wanted to ask some questions about, because it was constructed differently than what we had specified. He wanted to make sure that it wasn't going to be problematic over time, because there are some issues happening at the site. But I told him, I really appreciate that you're interested in doing things well, because it is hard to go to your boss and be like, well, you know, this was 30 years ago and it's not really even our problem. But I saw this thing and I just want to know what we should do about it. I encourage all my folks to do that. It makes everyone's life harder when you look at old plans, and you're like, well, maybe we should have done this or this, or maybe we should think about this now. But I would rather do it right. Always.”

Kathleen goes on to describe the management practice that she uses to empower and inspire her two direct reports by giving them agency to address work issues. She said “I think I like people more than most engineers. And that kind of gives me an edge. [laughter] You know, I really, I really, really care about ... I've got two employees under me right now. And more than anything, I want them to feel like they can do what they want to. Because I know that they want to do well. And I don't even care if they stay with [Kathleen's department]. If they want me as a reference to go somewhere else to do something different, that's fine, too. I care about them and their career outside of my own goals. And I think that that's a big part of being a good manager.

Describing the episode above regarding a specific project, she said, “I want them to own it, I want them to feel like ‘this project is yours ... If you give them the big picture, this is what's going to happen; this is the benefit of our project, you are actually saving

lives with this project, you're actually saving people's homes. Then people feel more invested in it, and they're going to do a better job.” Sam offers a similar concern for helping his direct reports to thrive in a cooperative and harmonious team. In a department with frequent employee turnover, he sees his role as “trying to be something stable in a sea of change.” He continues, acknowledging the sometimes difficult balance inherent in his work as a supervisor, saying “with discipline in general, trying to be just and fair when it comes to setting an example. I hate, I HATE writing up the discipline. But at the same time if I don't do it, it sets bad precedents.”

Sam recognizes the need to establish rapport with those he supervises. Some of whom are what he calls “eccentric” by which he seems to mean unbalanced. Describing his relationship with one such eccentric worker whom he knows is also a Christian, Sam says, “when they're eccentric, they kind of go off the rails and they kind of forget how to work with others. And so, I try to remind them, ‘Hey, you know, we're both called to a higher purpose. We can't take the low way out, we can't, you know, talk bad behind so-and-so's back. Granted, that person you're talking about is sometimes a little bit crazy, but as people, as a team, you guys have to work together through the differences.’” Sam takes a similarly positive, relational approach when dealing with employees in other departments with whom he occasionally works. He, says, “I try to establish a working relationship with them, and provide them with some kindness back ... Kingdom-wise, when thinking about that relationship, I just think giving them a lot of positivity back is refreshing to hear, rather than, ‘Oh, here we gotta deal with Sam again, he's a real pain in the butt.’ [laughter].” He continues, “I look forward to that kind of relationship going forward, because like we've just established such a professional rapport, but kind of just

provide them with something, a bit different than what they're used to. I kind of like, you know, being different that way. Optimism is kind of contagious. And so, when they come in, I'm kind of optimistic towards them.” Asked whether he thinks his colleagues can glimpse the Kingdom of God through him, Sam responds, “I hope so... it would be interesting to see the perspective from their point of view.”

Both Sam and Sharon, who performed an act of kindness toward a colleague, acknowledged that they may never know the impact of their effort to make the workplace more like the Kingdom of God. As supervisors to whom other employees report, Sam and Marilyn both describe their practice of using performance evaluations as an opportunity to build up employees. Marilyn says she is currently struggling with upcoming reviews for two underperforming employees. She said, “the word that comes to mind is patience ... displaying patience and understanding and support.” The challenge for Marilyn is how to deliver the review in a way that fosters the growth and development of her reports. She said, “I have to be honest, in these evaluations, so I have to point out the issues. But try to also point out the positives because there are some with both individuals.”

Sam identified with the need for a balanced and honest approach to employee evaluations. “I can relate, too, because when someone's underperforming, it's almost like everyone else in the shop does not like them, like there's always a weak link in the chain. But at the same time from a management perspective, when we lose one person, the rest of the team has to carry it.” Sam sees his role as helping the underperforming employee grow and develop by being positive, citing something that the employee does well. This process which he describes as “trying to build up the weak link professionally and just



trying to pour it into them,” requires being both professional and personal, and “trying to find that fine line between both.”

Lucy concurred with the importance of being positive in evaluations. Referencing her days as a classroom teacher, she said, “When we had parent teacher conferences, I would always try to start off with a funny story or something good, something positive that the child had done in the classroom. Then, then I could segue way into well, here's the report card, or here's the documentation on where they're not having success. And then end with something like the goal ... If you do positive thing, constructive criticism, and then positive, that works, then you've started and left with a good flavor.”

Others who work in a non-supervisory capacity, also experience Kingdom-like aspects of their work. Christine expressed a clear sense of joy in her work with people and their pets. The mutuality, trust and appreciation that characterizes her work environment are, for her, markers of the Kingdom. She says, “My clients do tell me how much they appreciate me, and I was never in a position like that before in all my other jobs. I had a client text me and she was like, I don't know what I would do without you. And I texted her back and you know, I was like thank you. I said ‘same’ I don't know what I would do without you.” That joy and appreciation extends to her relationship with her clients’ pets, noting “They're so happy to see me and I'm ecstatic to see them. December 5 will be a year that I've worked with this client, with these two dogs, and I built quite the relationship with both of them.”

Christine then reflected on her lack of awareness that in serving her clients and caring for their pets that she is serving Christ. She said, “I don't have the mindset that I'm doing Christ's work when I do my job.” She is conscious of a feeling of profound

gratitude to Christ for enabling her to do the work she does, and which gives her such joy and fulfillment. She concluded, “I just have to be better at consciously being aware that I am doing his work” although in retrospect, as she reflects back on her work, she is aware that it was a witness to Christ and his Kingdom.

In this section, I have analyzed the course transcriptions to arrive at the development of 9 themes pertaining to vocation as based on the lived experience and perceptions of participants. I found that theme 6, “God gives us gifts for our vocations,” emerged as the most significant, followed by theme 9, “Work should point to the Kingdom.” Theme 8, “The purpose of vocation is to serve Christ by helping others,” and theme 7, “God works through our vocation,” were the next most important themes. I analyze these themes further in the next chapter where I draw deeper conclusions about their significance. In analyzing the class transcripts, my perspective has been that of a participant observer. I now shift to analyze the quantitative results of the two surveys administered and will indicate the light they shed on the qualitative research above.

## **SURVEYS**

### **(i) Initial Survey**

I now focus on the results of the two surveys described briefly in Part II of this chapter. The initial survey was administered as the first activity of the first class. The purpose of the initial survey was to determine participants’ baseline experiences and perceptions of being a Christian at work. I formulated the questions to approach this objective from different angles, not knowing what I would find since I am not familiar

with the individual attitudes and work experiences of the participants. Because 4 participants were not able to attend the first class, there were only 8 responses to the initial survey. The survey itself had a total of 15 questions. These included whether and how often they feel that they are doing God's work, the degree to which they are conscious of being Christ's disciple at work, and God's presence in the work they do, their experience of being a Christian at work, including their inner experience, experience with colleagues and the overall culture of their workplace. The next 8 questions asked them to consider their vocation in light of their faith. Topics in this second set of questions included the understanding of their work as holy, their gifts for performing the specific work they do, and their sense of meaning and purpose in doing it.

The first set of 7 questions asked participants to indicate on a 5-point scale how often they experienced various aspects of their work as Christians. Available responses for the first 7 questions were Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always. For the purposes of evaluation and comparison, I assigned numerical values to each response. The values ranged from 1 for "Never" to 5 for "Always." The results and analysis are as follows:

**1. "How often, if ever, do you feel you are doing God's work in the place you work / among the people you work with or for?"**

Question 1 resulted in responses ranging from 3 to 5. The average of responses was 3.4, or a bit more often than "Sometimes."

**2. I am conscious of being Christ's disciple at work.**

Question 2 generated a wider range of responses, from 2 to 5. The average was again 3.4, indicating slightly more often that sometimes, though not often.

**3. I see God at work through the people among whom I work.**

Question 3 widened the focus to include the actions of colleagues. The range of responses was narrower than the first two questions, from 2 to 4. The average at 3.0 was lower than the first two questions, suggesting that participants were more likely to experience faith in themselves than in their colleagues.

**4. I feel compelled to be a different person at work than I am on Sunday at church.**

**5. I find myself doing things at work that disciples of Jesus probably should not do.**

**6. Other people with whom I work do things that disciples of Jesus should not do.**

**7. I wish the culture of my workplace could be more Christ-like.**

Questions 4 – 7 were designed to get at the possibility of external pressures that might hinder faithful Christian witness in the workplace. Here, too, results suggested a significant difference between the experience of participants with regard to the impact of such external pressures on their own actions and the actions of peers. For Question 4, the range was 1 to 3, with an average of 1.8 or rarely. For Question 5, the range was also 1 to 3, with an average of 2.3, or rarely.

Question 6, by comparison, produced a range of responses from 2 to 4, with an average of 3.0 or sometimes. This suggested that colleagues engage in behavior contrary

to Christ more often than the participants. Question 7 attempted to capture participants' perception of the overall culture of their workplace. The range of responses was wider for this question ranging from 2 to 5. The average was 3.3, suggesting that participants more frequently than sometimes, but not often, wish the culture of their workplace could be more aligned with what they understand to be a Christ-like culture. It also suggests that there are factors other than their colleagues' actions that create a culture contrary to the values of Christ.

Questions 8 through 15 seek to identify participants' the nature of their vocational work, their giftedness to perform it and its impact on themselves and others. Available responses were Completely Disagree / Disagree somewhat / Neutral or not sure / Agree somewhat / Completely agree. A numerical value of responses ranged from 1 for Completely Disagree to 5 for Completely Agree.

**8. My work has very little to do with my faith.**

**9. It is hard to connect what I experience on Sunday in church with what I do at work.**

Questions 8 and 9 were intended to identify any potential disconnect between church / spiritual life and work life. Responses to Questions 8 ranged from 1 to 3, with an average of 2.0, suggesting that participants find their faith relevant to their work experience. In Question 9, responses fell in a wider range, from 1 to 4, with an average of 2.2., suggesting that participants can connect their worship experience at church on Sunday with their work experience Monday through Friday.

**10. The work I do is holy in God's eyes.**

**11. The work I do is as holy as the work pastors do.**

Questions 10 and 11 were asked in the affirmative and were intended to identify the degree to which participants perceive their work as sacred. This would serve as a measure of receptiveness to Martin Luther's assertion of the Priesthood of All Believers which is the cornerstone on which Reformed Theology of vocation is built, as well the cornerstone of the 5-part course I was teaching. I was pleasantly surprised at the affirmative response. The range of responses for Question 10 was 3 to 5, with an average of 3.8. The range of responses to Question 11 was much wider, from 1 to 5. The average was 3.6. This indicated that participants generally regard the work they do as sacred, but not quite as sacred as the work pastors do. This suggested to me that the ancient bifurcation of vocations in the early and medieval church between sacred ordained vocations and secular vocations of the laity persist, even if only to a minor degree, among Protestants.

**12. I have specific skills, talents, and interests that make me well-suited to the work I do.****13. I feel fulfilled by doing the work I do.**

Questions 12 and 13 addressed participants' sense of their own giftedness to perform their vocations and the fulfillment they derive from using those gifts in undertaking their work. The responses to both questions indicated emphatic agreement. The range for Question 12 was 4-5, with an average of 4.8. The range of responses to question 13 was the same, with an average of 4.7.

**14. The primary source of satisfaction I get from doing the work I do is making money to support my family & myself.**

Questions 14 sought to identify whether the source of fulfillment in work is monetary gain rather than non-monetary sources. The range of responses here was wide, from 1 to 5. The average was 3.4, indicating that participants derive at least an equal measure of fulfillment from financial compensation as they do from other factors, and perhaps a bit more.

**15. The work I do is important and meets the needs of others.**

Question 15 sought to identify an alternative source of participants' fulfillment and meaning in their work. The range of responses to this question was the narrowest of all, with all 5's and one 4, and an average of 4.9. This made it clear that participants' view the work they do as meaningful because it is important to meeting the needs of others.

Overall, I was pleasantly surprised by the responses to the initial survey. It indicated to me an openness to the class content that I would deliver and was the platform from which I conducted the class sessions going forward. In particular, I saw in the responses to Questions 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 affirmation of themes 2, 3, 7 and 8 identified through analysis of class transcripts. Further, the survey responses to questions 3, 6, 7, 13 and 15 affirmed theme 9. The responses to question 12 affirmed themes 4 and 5 from the class transcript analysis. At the same time, it made me wonder whether the class material and discussions would have any significant positive effect on the perceptions of participants regarding the potential of the Reformed Theological understanding of

vocation to increase their sense of being Christ's faithful witnesses in the workplace. To measure this impact, I designed the final survey, to the results of which I now turn.

*(ii) Final Survey*

The final survey was administered at the end of the fifth and final class and followed a pattern similar to that of the initial survey. Of the original 15 survey questions, I repeated 8 in the final survey, which had a total of 13 questions. I used the same 5-point scales as in the Initial survey for these 8 questions on both the initial and final surveys so that I could compare responses to measure changes in perceptions attributable to the course. Of the other 5 questions in the final survey, two were modifications of original questions, and 3 were new. The 3 new questions asked participants to indicate their perception of the impact of the 5-part course on their understanding of vocation and work as Christian witness. My analysis of the survey results is as follows:

- 1. How often, if ever, do you feel you are doing God's work in the place you work / among the people you work with or for?**
- 2. I am conscious of being Christ's disciple at work.**

I narrowed the number of questions in the first section from seven to three because I during the course I sharpened my focus on self-perceived witness, as compared to the more general focus of my pre-course survey questions when I was more concerned about external pressures affecting witness. In the final survey I used the same two questions from the initial survey with the same available responses of Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always.



The range of responses to Question #1 was 3 to 5 with an average of 3.8, or often. This represented a 0.4 increase in perceived frequency compared to the initial survey.

The range of responses to Question #2 was 2 to 5 with an average of 3.6, or often. This represented a 0.2 increase in perceived frequency compared to the initial survey, which was sometimes. This suggests that participants are more aware of being God's instrument than they are of being Christ's intentional disciples, something that came out in Finn's response to Theme #8 above. The fact that both scores increased as the result of the course was an encouraging sign regarding its potential to increase participants' awareness of their role as Christian witnesses in the workplace.

### **3. I see God at work through my words, actions, decisions, and/or interactions where I work.**

I modified the wording of the third question in order to get a sense of the difference in how often participants' see God at work in their own words, actions, decisions and interactions others at work (the question in the Final survey) compared to those of their colleagues (the question in the first survey). The range of responses for the first survey was 2 to 4. The range of responses for the final survey was 3 to 5. The average frequency in the first survey was 3.0, or sometimes. The average frequency in the final survey was 3.9, or often. This differential was the single greatest change in responses to any of the survey questions. It suggests that participants may be more likely to be conscious of God working through themselves than through their colleagues. In retrospect, I wish I had asked the question both ways in each survey, to get a sense of the degree to which the course itself might be responsible for the change. In the absence of that, we might hypothesize that, because they are more conscious of their own Christ-

oriented motivations and intentions than the nature of the motivations and intentions of their colleagues, they are more likely to see their actions as Godly and Christ-like, but this cannot be substantiated by the data.

**4. My work has very little to do with my faith.**

**5. It is hard to connect what I experience on Sunday in church with what I do at work.**

Questions 4 and 5 were also repeated from the initial survey where they were questions 8 and 9. The range of responses to both questions expanded to 1 to 5, compared to 1 to 3 and 1 to 4 respectively in the first survey. The average response increased as well from 1.8 to 2.0 and from 2.0 to 2.2, respectively. Although the response was still only somewhat disagree, the increase in both suggests that the course may have had the modest effect of increasing the connection participants feel between their faith and their work, affirming the observations recorded in the transcripts for a wide range of themes from 2 through 9.

**6. The work I do is holy in God's eyes.**

**7. I feel fulfilled by doing the work I do.**

**8. God has given me specific skills, talents, and interests that make me well-suited to the work I do.**

Questions 6, 7 and 8 were also repeated from the initial survey where they were questions 10, 13 and 12 respectively. This grouping was intended to understand to what degree participants saw a connection between the holiness of work, our divine preparation for that work and the fulfillment experienced in doing it. The range of

responses increased for all 3 questioned, as did the average for all three. For question 6, the average increased from 3.8 to 4.3, an increase of 0.5, indicating stronger agreement though both would Agree Somewhat. For question 7, the average increased from 4.3 to 4.7, an increase of 0.4, moving from Agree Somewhat to Completely Agree. For question 8, the average response increased from 4.6 to 4.8, again indicating stronger agreement as the result of the course. The increases support the transcript comments with regard to themes 2 (holiness of work), 4 (thriving at work), and 6 (giftedness for work).

**9. When I serve others at work, I am conscious of being Christ's disciple, though I don't always see it right away.**

Question 9 was an attempt to revisit the responses to Questions 1 and 2 (doing God's work and being Jesus' disciple) on the initial survey, adding in the understanding of Theme 8 (the purpose of work is serving Christ by meeting the needs of others). Relative to these questions on the first survey, which both yielded an average response of 3.4, the average response to Question 9 on the final survey was 3.8, with a wider range of responses from 1 to 5. While this seems to suggest an increased understanding of the nature of discipleship as serving others. This would affirm the impact of the class with regard to Theme 8 (purpose of vocation is to serve Christ by serving others.)

**10. I can influence the culture of my workplace to be more Christ-like.**

Question 10 was an attempt to assess participants' sense of agency with regard to influencing work culture to be more Christ-like, the subject of Theme 9 (work should point to the Kingdom). The question relating to this topic in the initial survey (Question 7) asked about the frequency of desire that work culture could be more Christ-like. The

average response to that question was 3.3 or sometimes. The average response to Question 10 in the final survey was 3.6 or Agree Somewhat. The comparison is not exact, of course, but this suggests to me not only a higher desire among participants to influence their work culture be more like the Kingdom, taken as synonymous with likeness to Christ and Christian values, but the confidence that their witness to Christ can effect that change. This would affirm the comments recorded by participants in Theme 9.

**11. This small group has not changed my understanding of being Christ's disciple and witness at work.**

**12. This small group has not changed the way I work with others at my workplace.**

**13. As a result of my experience in this small group I have a clearer sense of my vocation as serving Christ by serving others at work.**

The purpose of Questions 11, 12, and 13 was to understand participants' perceptions of the impact of the course on their perception of being Christ's witness in the workplace and the actions on behalf of others that this entails, the central question this research seeks to address. I formulated the first two questions in the negative to reduce the effect of biased responses by those who might be seeking to please their pastor. There would be no way to eliminate that possibility, of course, given my involvement as a participant in the research and my pre-existing relationships with the participants.

Question 11 was another attempt to understand the change in perception of being Christ's witness at work, due to the participation in the course. The response to Question 2 in the final survey (conscious of being Christ's witness at work) suggested that participants had experienced a slight increase in the frequency of experiencing themselves as Christian witnesses in their workplace, and this was commensurate with the results of Question 11.

The average of responses was 1.5, or mid-way between Completely disagree and Disagree Somewhat. The range was 1 to 3. Similarly, Question 12 sought participants' perceptions of the way the course altered their interaction with work colleagues. Here, too, the range was 1 to 3, in this case with an average of 1.7, falling between Disagree Completely and Disagree Somewhat.

Finally, Question 13 asked the fundamental question in a positive frame, seeking participants' sense of their sense of vocation as serving Christ by serving others. The average of responses was 4.8, with a narrow range of 4 to 5. This offers strong affirmation of the comments suggesting Theme 8, which is a paraphrase of Question 13.

### **Summary**

The transcriptions of five classes, one class exercise, and two surveys produced a substantial amount of data which I have analyzed in Part III of this chapter. I believe the data support the conclusion that the application of the Reformed understanding of vocation within a small group cohort can increase participants' perception of being Christ's witnesses in their workplace. Below I summarize the learnings arising from this research as nine themes:

#### **Table 2: Major Themes from Both Surveys and Class Transcripts**

##### **1) All of us have multiple vocations that cover all areas of life**

- Personal / familial
- Public / professional
- Spiritual / church

**2) All morally valid vocations are holy – Priesthood of All Believers**

- All our vocations are potentially and equally holy and sacred.
- We just do different work.

**3) Work has dignity and divine mandate.**

- We work because God works.
- God created us to do very good work as he did. The fall did not change that.

**4) God intends for us to rejoice and thrive in our work**

- Work is inherent to God's vision for humankind – as it was in paradise.

**5) God chooses our vocation for us**

- We don't choose it for ourselves. We have to listen.
- Vocations can change - require ongoing discernment.

**6) God gives us various and diverse gifts to undertake our vocation and do our work**

- God has given each of us differing gifts, talents, and passions.
- Our gifts are a clue to the work God wants us to do.
- We are to use our gifts to help build up the body of Christ.

**7) God works through our vocations**

- We are God's partners in his ongoing creation.
- We partner with God to transform creation to be more like the Kingdom.
- God places us where we are meant to be among people we are meant to serve.

**8) The purpose of our vocation / work is to serve Christ by serving needs of others.**

- Work is subject to Christ's Lordship.
- Vocation is a channel for God's love through our service to others.
- Christ is the inspiration and model for our work: self-sacrificial service to others.

- Our purpose is to help all humans flourish as God intended.

### **9) Work should point to the Kingdom**

- Work is the chief way we can influence our world to be more like the Kingdom.
- Christian witness at work can influence culture of the workplace.
- Workplaces should function like the Kingdom – with humility, harmony, and mutuality.
  - Righteous, just/fair, peaceful, joyous, mutually supportive, cooperative, productive, and caring, rejoicing with others, sharing others' pain & suffering.
- Management can/should facilitate this teamwork by enabling all to use their gifts.

In this chapter, I have described the structure of this research project, the resources on which I drew in undertaking it, the analysis I conducted on the resulting data, and the detailed learnings this produced. The project resulted in 9 themes which emerged from ethnographic analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data generated by the transcripts of 5 course sessions of the Faith and Work small group, a group exercise, and surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the course. The emergent themes reflect the biblical and Reformed theological understandings of vocation which I outlined in Chapter 2. I rely on these themes as I engage in further theological analysis and project evaluation to arrive at conclusions in Chapter 4, to which I now turn.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will evaluate the research project to highlight aspects of the research that were effective and point out aspects that could have been improved. I will then further evaluate the 9 themes identified in Chapter 3 to indicate what was surprising and to suggest a grouping of the 9 themes into 4 categories that, through more analysis, reveal key learnings of the project in relation to the biblical and Reformed understandings of vocation and work. I will then outline the implications of the project for my ministry and possible application to the wider church. I will conclude by suggesting some possible avenues of further research on the central research question.

I begin with an overall assessment of the project. The question I sought to answer in undertaking this project is “How can the application of the Reformed theology of vocation within the context of a cohort of employed members of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania help cohort members find Christian meaning in the work they do and a greater sense of being Christ’s witnesses in the workplace?” My thesis was that the Reformed understandings of vocation are valid and foundational to participants’ sense of holistic integration of faith and work, and that this sense of faithfulness can be enhanced through a structured curriculum involving the introduction of Reformed concepts of vocation in a group setting, applied in practical ways, and affirmed through individual and group reflection.



The project accomplished the goal of providing an answer to the guiding research question and a validation of the thesis which underpins it. My analysis of the research data indicated that the curriculum and practical exercises I devised, based on biblical and Reformed understandings of vocation, resulted in a modest increase in participants' integration of faith and work, driven by a greater perception of being Christ's witnesses in their work and workplace.

### **Project planning, preparation, and implementation**

In this section I point out aspects of the research that were effective and aspects that could have been improved. I begin with the planning and preparation preceding the actual research. As I note in chapter 3 above, the methodological foundation of the research originated in June 2021 through study with Dr. Katie Cross in the Doctor of Ministry course "DM411 Research Methods." Her guidance was immensely helpful in undertaking this research project. This was augmented by study with Dr. Edwin van Driel in June 2022 in the Doctor of Ministry course "DM 411 Ecumenism" as well as input from Dr. Angela Hancock of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Dr. Alison Jack of the University of Edinburgh New College. In addition, I engaged in extensive private study of Martin Luther's writings on vocation, contemporary Reformed scholars Gustaf Wingren, Eugene Veith, Miroslav Volf, Ben Witherington, and J. Daryl Charles, as well as biblical exegesis of relevant passages in Genesis, Romans, and I Corinthians. Though extraordinarily time-consuming, the effort to read extensively on the topic paid off by giving me a clear picture of the evolution of Reformed thinking on the topic of vocation, and a firm foundation for the research I undertook.

A significant part of the proposal preparation process involved understanding my motivation for undertaking this project. This self-reflection was helpful in giving me a better perspective on my mid-life vocational transition in the years following 9/11. In moving from a 20-year career in sales and marketing to pastoral ministry, I recognized two things: first, the critical importance and sheer difficulty of faithfully discerning vocational transition, and, second, the utter dearth of available resources to help Christians like me make this transition. Over the past 20 years as I have pursued my pastoral vocation, a lingering question remained unresolved. Why was I not able to find Christian fulfillment in the work I was doing in the business world? This led me to wonder how other Christians experienced their faith at work and so, prior to beginning study in the DMin program, I read with keen interest David Miller's study of the development of the Faith at Work Movement, "God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement." This was helpful in providing a contextual framework for my experience. It was also helpful in the proposal creation process, in which both Dr. Hancock and Dr. Jack cautioned me to be aware of a potential bias that I might bring to the research based on my experience of vocational transition. This guidance proved to be invaluable in my formulation of both the class content and the survey questions.

This led me to consider reflexively the potential influence of my position as pastor to the participants and simultaneously participant observer undertaking the research. As I noted in Chapter 3 above, I concluded that there would be no escaping the influence that I have as pastor to the members of the small group, and that this influence would be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the warm relationships I have with all the participants was important in gaining their trust and willingness to participate in the

small group. I believe our close relationships were also responsible for the free, deep, and sometimes emotional sharing that characterized our discussions, since participants clearly felt that this was safe to do. On the other hand, I also sensed a subtle desire among participants to please me and make the project a success. This was never stated overtly, and it is possible that I was reading this into the in-depth responses themselves.

Nevertheless, I was conscious of this perhaps inevitable source of bias and made a strong effort to limit it. As I noted earlier, I never made value judgments and rarely contributed my own observations. When I did speak, I did so primarily to ask for clarification of participants' observations or to encourage them to 'say more about that,' a phrase I used often. I also was explicit, most emphatically at the time of administering the final survey, that the results of the research would have absolutely no effect on my own evaluation by faculty readers.

In another very practical sense, the project was also the product of a confluence of factors affecting the ongoing vitality of the congregation I serve, Silver Spring Presbyterian Church (SSPC). Like many congregations, the demographic profile of our membership skews older and there is a need to engage more young families in the life of the church. In order to do that, we began an initiative two years ago to form small groups that would appeal to young families and young adults. The beginning of that initiative coincided with the creation of my research proposal, and I began to consider using the small group format for my research project. At the same time, another need crystalized in conversations with several of our Elders, who expressed a desire for the congregation to become more outward looking in our programs and communications. The prospect of engaging young families in which both parents work fulltime and who spend most of

their waking hours at work was one of the drivers for my decision to focus my project on the integration of faith and work, since it would be an effective way for them to make a direct connection between church and work, between what they experienced on Sunday and what they experienced Monday through Friday. As I note above regarding Newbigin's Frontier Groups, the vision for possible post-project follow-up includes extending an invitation to the growing number of young families who are moving to homes popping up all around our church to join the Faith and Work small group initiative.

With the proposal written, I began gathering more resources and was soon overwhelmed. As part of the proposal development process, Dr. Jack then suggested that I narrow the theological focus to vocation, rather than attempting to include the closely related doctrines of divine sovereignty and providence. That proved to be wise counsel. It would mean focusing on Luther and only minimally on Calvin who generally affirmed Luther's thinking on vocation. I initially struggled and failed to find an accessible online and comprehensive source of Luther's writings in English. As a result, I first approached Luther through the eyes of prominent Lutheran scholars, beginning with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Swedish Lutheran scholar Gustaf Wingren. Having made my way through Wingren's complicated and somewhat confusing reading of Luther, I then turned to a more accessible contemporary summary of Luther's doctrine of vocation by Lutheran scholar Eugene Veith, whom I found to be a more accessible guide to Luther's theology of vocation. Veith also gave voice to my frustrating experience of trying to follow the thread of Luther's thinking on vocation, since Luther, unlike Calvin, was not a systematic theologian, but rather a preacher who responded to controversies of the church and

topical issues relevant to his congregation, primarily in his sermons. This left me frustrated and grasping for a starting point. I found it in a primary source I had from my seminary days which contained Luther's "Toward the Christian Nobility" in which Luther lays out the rationale for what has come to be known as The Priesthood of All Believers, the cornerstone of his doctrine of vocation. I noted the primarily Pauline scriptural references Luther makes there, and I began to formulate a sense that I Corinthians and Romans would be important biblical resources.

After a literature search for more contemporary treatments of the Reformed understanding of vocation, I performed in-depth private study of Miroslav Volf's influential work "Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work." I was surprised at Volf's perception of what he called the profoundly alienating nature of work in modernity. At the same time, I was intrigued by his proposal of a pneumatological approach in developing a theology of work. I was also surprised by Volf's harsh critique of Luther and the Reformed tradition's development of the doctrine of vocation. I was especially surprised by Volf's view that scripture provides an insufficient basis for a theology of work, and his assertion that Luther's notion of vocation is so removed from the context of modern work that it is not only unhelpful, but possibly dangerous. I suspected Volf's view was reductionist and confirmed this suspicion when I found a more biblically sound treatment of the Reformed notion of vocation by scholar J. Daryl Charles.

I found Charles' critique of Volf compelling and persuasive. I was particularly intrigued by Charles' emphatic reaffirmation of Luther's notion of vocation and the holy nature of work, and contra Volf, its eminent applicability to modern work and workers.

Even more, I was persuaded by Charles' emphasis on the nature of pre-lapsarian creation as an essential foundation for a doctrine of vocation and work which emphasizes an eschatological view of the renewal of all creation to its pre-lapsarian glory, including work. I noted with interest Charles' broader biblical basis for a theology of vocation in comparison with the limited scriptural basis of Volf. Charles was persuasive in arguing that an adequate Reformed understanding of vocation must also draw on the Christ Hymn in Colossians, which proclaims the subjection of all things to Christ, including work, workers, and workplaces. Most striking of all, I was surprised and pleased to note Charles' emphatic assertion that the reclamation of the Reformed notion of vocation and work is the single greatest opportunity Christians possess to witness to their faith, an opportunity that goes beyond what he calls the stereotypical evangelistic means of verbal testimony.

While I found much in Charles' proposal that was helpful, I remained cautious for the simple reason that I had not previously heard of him or his work. This prompted me to search for other contemporary sources to validate Charles' affirmation of Luther's understanding of vocation and the incarnational transformation possible in the present realm of work, which Charles calls a sign pointing to the Kingdom in which the glory of prelapsarian creation is completely renewed. I found this affirmation in "Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor" by Ben Witherington, a scholar whose biblical commentaries I trust. It was at this point that I finally located a comprehensive English-language translation of Luther's works online. This allowed me to conduct a more thorough and efficient search for Luther's sermons and other writings to locate references to the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2, Colossians 1, Romans 12, and I Corinthians 12,

which I had by now come to see as central biblical resources for my project. My research into Luther's writings confirmed this.

It was now September 2023 and high time to begin creating resources for the classes I would teach later in the fall. I revisited Karen O'Reilly's guidance regarding small group ethnography which made me more comfortable in my decision to use this methodology for the project. I also began to draft the initial survey, creating questions about group participants' understanding of the nature and experience of work, and their impression of the present and future significance of work in light of Christ and his coming Kingdom. At this point, I also decided to add a post-class survey, to be created as the end of the course approached, in order to determine what, if any, affect the course had on participants' understanding of those same questions. This was the right decision. Both surveys proved helpful, in that they offered a quantitative measure of the qualitative data gleaned by ethnographic analysis and suggested at least a directional impact resulting from participation in the small group. As I outlined above in chapter 3, The final survey showed an increase in participants' perceptions of being Christ's witnesses at work. The results of the initial survey surprised me more than those of the final survey. The initial survey indicated a relatively high frequency of participants' experience of being Jesus' disciple and doing God's work in their workplace. I did not expect this, perhaps because in my own career, I had little sense of this and was sensitive to aspects of work that routinely defied this notion. As I offer new ministerial and research initiatives below, this underscores the potential benefit of a curriculum like the one I have undertaken in this project.

With class outlines, initial survey, Skills Grid exercise and PowerPoint slides created, I began to recruit participants. Based on my past experience in trying to recruit young families for programs, I knew that persuading them to participate in the Faith and Work small group would be difficult. Here, Dr. Katie Cross' advice to provide incentives proved crucial. I decided to provide free food, childcare, and a convenient class schedule. Having learned from past experience that young couples and families tend not to respond to church-wide announcements, I augmented our congregation-wide communications with direct invitations to specific people to participate in the Faith and Work small group. I chose to recruit from the participants in our 11:00 am informal / contemporary worship service. I scheduled the class to start immediately after the conclusion of that service, beginning with free lunch and the provision of free childcare. This proved to be effective. We exceeded my initial goal of recruiting 6 – 10 participants, ending up with a total of 12 participants. The downside to providing lunch and childcare was the expense, which I incurred personally. In retrospect, I wish I had organized more help for food prep as I ended up doing much of it myself. Further, adding lunch made starting and ending on time difficult, but that did not become an obstacle to attendance, as I had initially feared. In the end, the expense and bother of providing lunch and childcare was worthwhile.

The class structure and format worked well, generally. Five classes felt to me like the right length, as evidenced by the group's generally high level of engagement throughout. The use of PowerPoint slides also worked well as it was a familiar medium to participants. I critique myself for not paying enough attention to the effect of the light in the room, however. The use of lighter color backgrounds in parts of the PowerPoint caused the text to become illegible at times. A brighter projector would have been helpful



in addressing this issue. The structure of the class also worked well. Except for the first class, when the initial survey was administered, the other classes began with a brief recap of the previous class's topic and assignment, followed by group discussion and reflection. After roughly 30 – 35 minutes of discussion, I proceeded to lecture on a new topic for another 20 minutes or so, and then we closed with prayer offered by one of the participants. This seemed to provide a good balance of participation and instruction.

The small group format and open-ended, semi-structured framework for discussion, proved to be effective in eliciting pertinent and meaningful data. I knew from Dr. Cross' course on Research Methods in which I had conducted an ethnography based on individual interviews, that this semi-structured approach could produce a wealth of meaningful data for analysis, but I was unsure of using the same approach in a group setting. The two chief risks that I considered, based on Karen O'Reilly's guidance, were the potential for dominance of one voice over others and the possibility of self-censoring due to the presence of others, including me as pastor to all the participants. In facilitating group discussions, I believe I minimized the latter risk by never offering a judgmental comment on any observation but instead consistently asking either the speaker or the group for their reflection on the observations and comments made. In facilitating the discussion, I routinely asked open-ended questions and tried not to intrude on moments of silence. My market research background was helpful in this regard, but it was not always easy. In hindsight, it seemed to work as my presence became smaller and the group's voice and opinions became progressively more prominent, a pattern that was reflected during each class discussion as I noted in the transcripts. I also attempted to keep in mind who was speaking most and who had not spoken enough so as to solicit their input or

responses. I then encouraged their continued reflection when they paused speaking. As I evaluated the full class transcripts to compile the ethnography in chapter 3, I was struck by the fact that observations on the various aspects of vocation that I presented were routinely made at length, with nuance and appropriate emotion, suggesting to me deep personal engagement and thoughtful reflection. Further, in every class transcript there were multiple instances of other group members reflecting back to the speaker, affirming, and expanding on the comments made by the first speaker. The effectiveness of the group context in eliciting meaningful data was a mild, but pleasant surprise, given my initial uncertainty about the small group context as the basis for ethnography.

With regard to instructional content, it seemed to me, based on the group discussion and assignments, that the use in each class of a mixture of material from Luther (or other contemporary Reformed theologians) and from scripture was effective in conveying the Reformed theological understanding of vocation and work as the context for Christian witness. The most successful content in terms of eliciting discussion and reflection was the Skills Grid Exercise. I base this conclusion on the volume and depth of the individual and group reflection that it generated regarding participants' understanding of their gifts and how they use their gifts in their vocation. A critique I have of myself is that I could have done a better job in getting more of the participants to complete this exercise and I could perhaps have devoted more classroom time to this reflection. Allocating class time in Class #2 to starting the Skills Grid exercise might have been a better way to do this. I hesitated to do that, however, because the initial plan to allocate class time for journaling on the previous week's assignment did not prove helpful for the group.

The in-class activities that proved most helpful in eliciting useful data were the initial and final surveys. They provided a useful measure of the increase in perception of individual vocational themes as reflected in the changes from the first to second survey, and specifically the responses of participants to the direct questions at the end of the second survey. In hindsight, I should have used an online survey tool which could have captured responses from those who missed the first two classes. This might also have made it easier to gather responses to open-ended questions and could also perhaps have been useful in analyzing the results. As I note below in the section on future research possibilities, such a survey might be applied to a larger, more diverse group to establish a baseline comparison of various populations' perceptions of being a Christian at work. Finally, with regard to the transcription of data, the use of an online transcription tool was a wise decision. It saved me a considerable amount of time, time I was able to use more fruitfully in editing and analyzing the data from the transcripts. The cost was minimal, and the results were good, though not perfect. The amount of data provided was also appropriate to the size and timeframe of the project.

Despite the self-critiques I note in my evaluation of the project above, I am generally pleased with the direction I took and decisions I made regarding the planning, preparation, and implementation of the project, as well as the extent and quality of the data it produced and the themes it generated. I turn now to consider these themes.

### *Key themes and their implications*

In this section, I explore further the 9 themes I identified through analysis of the research data, and I draw an overall conclusion about the effectiveness of the study, as well as some unexpected insights it produced. As I analyzed the data from class transcripts, the Skills Grid exercise, and both surveys, I came to see the emergence of 9 themes related to participants' sense of vocation and its relationship to Christian witness in the workplace. I have discussed these in detail in chapter 3. Now, I move to further analyze those themes and aggregate them into 4 broad themes which, through yet more analysis, provide meaningful data regarding the groups' overall perception of vocation and Christian witness in the workplace.

In identifying the 9 individual themes outlined in Chapter 3, I first coded meaningful text from the discussion portion of the transcripts of each class. Of the total of 38,000 words transcribed, I determined that just over 8,000 were meaningful. I then compiled all those meaningful responses for each code under an individual theme that described them. In Chapter 3, I highlighted the most meaningful responses for each individual theme. I then performed further analysis of the 8,075 words in the original compilation of all coded meaningful responses. From this analysis, I derived two important insights from the data. First, I noted a great disparity in the volume of meaningful responses under each of the 9 themes. Word-counts for each theme were as follows:

**Table 3. Analysis of Word Counts of Meaningful Coded Responses**

	<b>Individual Themes</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>% of Total Words</b>
1	All have multiple vocations	314	4%
2	All vocations are holy	54	1%
3	Work has dignity	185	2%
4	God want us to thrive in work	56	1%
5	God chooses our vocation	439	5%
6	God gives us gifts for our vocations	2,630	33%
7	God works through vocations	1,196	15%
8	Vocation is to serve Christ	1,389	17%
9	Work should point to the KOG	1,812	22%
	<b>Total Word Count:</b>	<b>8,075</b>	<b>100%</b>

The range of word-counts is broad, from 54 in theme 2, the holiness of all vocations, to 2,630 for theme 6, God gives us gifts for use in our vocations. The topic of giftedness alone elicited 33% of all meaningful discussion, almost twice as much word volume as the next nearest theme. This caused me to consider why there is such a wide disparity. I hypothesize that there are two primary reasons. First, the Skills Grid exercise was a key driver of the volume of meaningful content coded under theme 6, divine giftedness. The exercise was assigned at the conclusion of class #2 which focused on Calling and Giftedness. This exercise proved very effective in eliciting responses and

stimulating discussion, as I note above. The stated goal of the exercise was to answer the question “Am I still called to do the work I do, based on the gifts God has given me to do it?” The nature of this exercise is self-examination involving assessment of a lifetime’s worth of successful achievement and introspection of inherent skills, passions, abilities, and other gifts which make the achievement possible. Such assessment is tied to specific instances which, by their very nature as significant accomplishments are highly memorable and sources of great pride.

In the working world, the closest approximation to such an analysis occurs in the course of an employee’s annual evaluation and even then, the time-horizon is limited in scope to the past 12 months. Further, in that setting, there is often a high degree of stress because of the implications for promotion and financial compensation. Even when it comes to writing a resume to pursue a new job, achievements more than a few years old are de-emphasized in favor of more recent results. I believe that the opportunity of a life-long review of high achievements, coupled with the highly specific context of the successful application of gifts utilized to reach them and conducted within the consideration of the direction of one’s work and life, is highly compelling. It is an exercise designed to ask and answer the most fundamental question which Christians face, not only on the occasion of a mid-life crisis (or quarter-life crisis, as Sam noted), but at any times: “What am I doing with my life, and what does God want me to do with my life?”

In order to identify the second reason for the supremely compelling nature of giftedness as a topic of meaningful discussion and reflection, I coded the nine individual themes themselves by analyzing individual themes to determine a higher-level grouping

under broad categories of themes. This resulted in the emergence of 4 categories. As I did with the individual themes, I analyzed the word counts of the meaningful responses within each of the categories. The results are as follows:

**Table 4. Analysis of Word Counts of Meaningful Coded Responses by Category**

<b>Theme Categories</b> (Individual themes)		<b>Words</b>	<b>% of Total Words</b>
1	Nature of vocations (1 - 2)	368	5%
2	Nature of Work (3 - 4)	241	3%
3	Experience & Purpose of Work (5 - 8)	5,654	70%
4	Vision of Work (9)	1,812	22%
<b>Total Word Count</b>		<b>8,075</b>	<b>100%</b>

I used the following rationale for determining the grouping of individual themes into broader themes. Category 1, the nature of vocations includes Luther's central insight regarding the sacred nature of all vocations and the co-existence of every individual's multiple vocations in different spheres of life. Category 2, the nature of work, reflects God's intention that work should be a source of dignity, excellence, joy, and flourishing. Category 3, the experience and purpose of work, includes the understanding that God gives us gifts and places us in specific vocations and specific workplaces to do his work by using our gifts to serve others, and thereby serving Christ, even though we may not

recognize that at the time. Category 4, the vision of work, includes the understanding that work, workers, and workplaces can and do point to the reality of the coming Kingdom of God, characterized by aspects of the Kingdom such as righteousness, humility, compassion, and mutuality.

The range of word counts across these categories is even wider than that among the individual themes, from 240 for Category 2, the nature of work, to 5,654 for category 3, the experience and purpose of work. It is striking that Category 3 accounts for 70% of all the meaningful discussion that I discerned in my analysis of the class transcripts, including the deep reflection on theme 6, giftedness, which I analyzed above. I believe that the defining feature of responses in category 3, and the reason for its dominant role in eliciting meaningful reflection among participants, is its emphasis on the practice of discipleship. More than the other 3 categories of themes, the 4 themes that comprise category 4 all relate directly to the hands-on experience of work.

Examining Category 4 more closely, it is clear that theme 5 reflects the experience of 'fit' between one's gifts and the vocation to which we are led. Theme 6, as I outlined above, relates to the experience of giftedness and the application of those gifts at work in order to serve others, as theme 7 affirms. Theme 8 involves experiencing Christ-likeness and service to Christ through serving others. Even when the understanding expressed in themes 7 and 8 is not overtly recognized at the time of acting, as Christine and Finn both experienced when they did not realize they were serving Christ by serving others, it changes the way that future work is experienced, as Finn noted. From this, I conclude that Category 3, especially theme 6 on giftedness, is fundamentally experiential and therein lies its importance for participants in the Faith and Work small group. While Categories



1, 2, and 4 also relate in some degree to the experience of work, Category 3, and especially the experience of utilizing our gifts for God's purposes, is evidently the most prominent for participants in my project. I attribute this to the transforming experience of recognizing that God is using a worker as God's vessel to transform the world around us, as Martin Luther and his contemporary champion Daryl Charles affirm. I now shift to offer a summary of my findings in light of the Reformed theological principals attested by both scholars.

As I have shown above, the themes which emerged through my research and analysis are consistent with the fundamental theological importance of Martin Luther's concept of the Priesthood of All Believers, his emphasis on divine giftedness and vocational placement, and God's hiddenness in the actions of ordinary women and men pursuing their vocations in service to others. My research also affirms Daryl Charles' theological emphasis on the divine gift of work and its origin in pre-lapsarian creation, the subjection of all things to Christ inclusive of work and workers, the preeminent opportunity that Christians have to influence the culture of their workplace and the world by witnessing to Christ at work, and the Kingdom signs they create in so doing. I now move to consider future implications of my research project.

### **Implications for My Ministry and Further Research**

I concur with Daryl Charles' assessment of the urgent need for a new Reformation in the church, driven by a renewal of the church's understanding of vocation. This will require new resources for Christians. As he writes, "There is a vastly compelling need for resources that will enable pastors, priests, educators, Christian leaders, and indeed

laypersons themselves to cultivate a vision for (1) the design and dignity of work, (2) the importance of the doctrine of vocation, and (3) the high calling of the workplace” because “this is where we believers spend much of our lives and can best influence society. Nowhere will our presence be felt as it will in the marketplace. Nowhere else will the fruits of our faith be more on display.”<sup>119</sup> In the near term this suggests that I lead another Faith and Work small group here at SSPC and perhaps a separate group expressly for retirees, who also face the questions central to vocation, and for working women as was suggested by several women who participated in the Faith and Work small group.

Looking further afield, I see the opportunity to create a small group curriculum for use with groups outside our church walls in the community around us. Such a curriculum might be of use to the wider church. I also see a need for a faith-based guide to vocational discernment. Such a guide might be centered around the skills grid exercise that proved so useful in this research project. It could be expanded to include other measurement tools for identifying specific gifts including personality profiles such as Myers-Briggs or Enneagram. The research also suggests the possible need for a resource to address the mundane day-to-day workplace decisions, actions, and interactions to invest them with a greater sense of being Christ’s witness. I also wonder, for managers and other decision-makers, what might be a helpful resource for making faithful decisions that are potentially controversial or difficult?

I also see the need for further research to answer new questions which this research project raised for me. For example, how might the perception of being Christ’s witnesses at work change through the application of the Reformed understandings of

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<sup>119</sup> Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 15.

vocation in small groups comprised of varying profiles? These variables might include those who work in specific industries, companies, levels, professions, and regions. There is also the question of how results vary when applying Reformed vocational understandings to specific genders and age groups.

Finally, I am compelled by the emphasis on experience uncovered through my research, especially regarding Category 3 and theme 6 on giftedness. It causes me to wonder whether and how the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, with its emphasis on the experience of God interpreted within the community of faith, might provide a further theological resource for future research.

In this chapter, I have evaluated the research project to highlight aspects of the research that were effective and those aspects that could have been improved. I have also evaluated the 9 themes identified in Chapter 3 to indicate what was surprising and then grouped them into 4 categories that reflect the key learnings of the project in relation to the biblical and Reformed understandings of vocation and work. I have also presented the implications of the project for my ministry and possible application to the wider church. I have concluded by suggesting some avenues of further research on the central research question.

### **Conclusion**

The research project was successful in answering the primary research question, suggesting that the application of the Reformed understandings of vocation within a small group context had a modest impact on increasing participants' overall sense of being faithful witnesses at work, although they did not typically use theological language to

describe the topics. As I have indicated above, there are various aspects of the research that could have been improved and others that went well and even better than expected. Overall, the data produced by the class transcripts, Skills Grid exercise, and surveys provided rich grounds for analysis. The results of my analysis indicated the relevance of Reformed understandings of vocation to participants' perceptions of being Christ's witness at work, especially with regard to the experience and purpose of work. To a lesser degree, it also affirmed the relevance of the Reformed understandings of the nature of vocations, the nature of work, and the vision of work as a sign pointing to the coming Kingdom of God.

## APPENDIX 1. Consent Form



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Doctor of Ministry Degree  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

#### INTRODUCTION:

My name is Rev. Donald B. Wahlig and I am a student in the Reformed Cohort of the Doctor of Ministry program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. My cell phone number is (908) 512-1062. My email is [don@silverspring.org](mailto:don@silverspring.org). My research advisor is Dr. Katie Cross. Her phone number is +44(0)1224 273 056. Her email is [k.cross@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:k.cross@abdn.ac.uk). The study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary chaired by Dr. Angela Hancock. Her phone number is 412-924-1453. Her email is [ahancock@pts.edu](mailto:ahancock@pts.edu). Feel free to contact any of us at any time if you have questions at any point about this project.

#### PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is to study the intersection of Christian faith and work. The research will be conducted at Silver Spring Presbyterian Church in Mechanicsburg, PA. I am trying to learn more about how my congregation members experience faith at work, and whether / how their participation in a cohort of their peers in which I introduce Reformed understandings of vocation can increase their sense of being a faithful witness to Christ in their workplace. The anticipated title of the study is “Witness in the Workplace.”

**PROCEDURE:**

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways and make the following commitments. You will be asked to participate in 5 small group meetings beginning Sunday, October 22 and concluding November 19. At the first and last meetings you will be asked to complete a survey regarding your experience of faith at work. Beginning with the second group meeting, you will also be asked to write a brief journal entry regarding your experience of applying Reformed understandings of vocation during the previous week. These will be handed in to me. I will also make a digital audio recording of your participation in the context of the larger group. I will destroy all audio recordings after the conclusion of the research project.

**TIME REQUIRED:**

The project will begin on October 22 and will conclude on November 19. I anticipate each meeting will be approximately one hour in length. In total, you are being asked to commit to 5 hours of your time.

**VOLUNTARINESS:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still decline to be part of any session or answer any question that you do not wish to engage. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**RISKS:**

I do not anticipate any risks associated with this study. In any human subject research involving self-disclosure, there is always the possibility that you may feel discomfort or distress in the course of the research. If this happens, please inform me immediately and decline to participate if you wish.

**BENEFITS:**

I anticipate the following possible benefits (in list form) to you and/or your congregation.

The primary potential benefit to participants is an increased sense of fulfillment and faithfulness as Christian witnesses at work. A secondary potential benefit is a heightened perception of the value of their work in God's eyes. A third potential benefit is greater effectiveness and collegiality at work through understanding and application of their vocation to serve others. It is possible that a new ministry may arise as

the result of this research and, of so, the congregation would potentially benefit from that.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:**

I will be the only researcher present during the study. I will be the only person who sees/listens to any of its recordings. I will not share personal information that you tell me you have decided you do not wish to disclose. When I write the final paper, I will use pseudonyms (made-up names) for all participants and/or code the data I have received in such a way that your name will not be associated with it.

**SHARING THE RESULTS:**

I anticipate that the results of this research will be shared in the following ways:

The research will initially be shared with my two faculty readers, Dr. Katie Cross and Dr. Scott Hagley, as well as Dr. Donna Giver-Johnston, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Dr. Alison Jack, Professor of Bible and Literature and Principal of New College, University of Edinburgh. If approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry degree at PTS, it will presumably be bound and included in the PTS library stacks where it will be publicly available. I also anticipate sharing the summary of the research with the Session and congregation of Silver Spring Presbyterian Church. If a new ministry or academic pursuit arises from this research, I would conceivably share the summary with a wider audience within the Presbytery of Carlisle and perhaps other religious or academic institutions. You can receive my research findings by contacting me at [don@silverspring.org](mailto:don@silverspring.org). There is the possibility that I may publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

**BEFORE YOU SIGN:**

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this project with the possibility of being audio-taped, videotaped, and your words being written in a final paper. Be sure that you are fully satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have before signing. If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a copy of this document. I will keep a copy, and the original will be kept in print form for three years

in the Office of the Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Assessment.

**Participant's printed name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or guardian's printed name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or guardian's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's printed name:** Reverend Donald B. Wahlig

**Researcher's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX 2. Initial Survey****INITIAL SURVEY**

- 1. How often, if ever, do you feel you are doing God's work in the place you work / among the people you work with or for?**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 2. I am conscious of being Christ's disciple at work.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 3. I see God at work through the people among whom I work.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 4. I feel compelled to be a different person at work than I am on Sunday at church.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 5. I find myself doing things at work that disciples of Jesus probably should not do.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 6. Other people with whom I work do things that disciples of Jesus should not do.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 7. I wish the culture of my workplace could be more Christ-like.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following, using this 5-point scale:**

1 - Completely disagree

2 - Disagree somewhat

3 - Neutral or not sure

4 - Agree somewhat

5 - Completely agree

**8. My work has very little to do with my faith.**

1      2      3      4      5

**9. It is hard to connect what I experience on Sunday in church with what I do at work.**

1      2      3      4      5

**10. The work I do is holy in God's eyes.**

1      2      3      4      5

**11. The work I do is as holy as the work pastors do.**

1      2      3      4      5

**12. I have specific skills, talents, and interests that make me well-suited to the work I do.**

1      2      3      4      5

**13. I feel fulfilled by doing the work I do.**

1      2      3      4      5

**14. The primary source of satisfaction I get from doing the work I do is making money to support my family & myself.**

1      2      3      4      5

**15. The work I do is important and meets the needs of others**

1      2      3      4      5

**Please take a moment to complete the following responses:**

In your own words, how would you describe the way you experience your faith at work?

## Demographic / Occupational Information

Please select your age group:

- Under 25
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 or older

Primary work setting (please check one):

- Office
- Virtual / online
- Mix of in-person and online (indicate % of each)
- Outdoors – other people’s homes or businesses
- Classroom / Educational environment
- Other (describe)

Years you have done this specific work:

Years you have worked in this business / industry / occupation:

## APPENDIX 3. Final Survey

### FINAL SURVEY

- 1. How often, if ever, do you feel you are doing God's work in the place you work / among the people you work with or for?**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 2. I am conscious of being Christ's disciple at work.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- 3. I see God at work through my words, actions, decisions, and/or interactions where I work.**

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

**For the questions below, please use the following 5-point scale to indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement:**

- 1 - Completely disagree
- 2 - Disagree somewhat
- 3 - Neutral or not sure
- 4 - Agree somewhat
- 5 - Completely agree

**4. My work has very little to do with my faith.**

1      2      3      4      5

**5. It is hard to connect what I experience on Sunday in church with what I do at work.**

1      2      3      4      5

**6. The work I do is holy in God's eyes.**

1      2      3      4      5

**7. I feel fulfilled by doing the work I do.**

1      2      3      4      5

**8. God has given me specific skills, talents, and interests that make me well-suited to the work I do.**

1      2      3      4      5

**9. When I serve others at work, I am conscious of being Christ's disciple, though I don't always see it right away.**

1      2      3      4      5

**10. I can influence the culture of my workplace to be more Christ-like.**

1      2      3      4      5

**11. This small group has not changed my understanding of being Christ's disciple and witness at work.**

1      2      3      4      5

**12. This small group has not changed the way I work with others at my workplace.**

1      2      3      4      5

**13. As a result of my experience in this small group I have a clearer sense of my vocation as serving Christ by serving others at work.**

1      2      3      4      5

**In your own words, how – if at all – has your understanding of being Christ's disciple and witness in your workplace changed as the result of this small group? (use separate sheet if necessary)**

## APPENDIX 4. Class Outlines and Topics

### CLASS OUTLINE

#### WEEK 1

- Welcome & Ice-breaker
- Survey – initial experience of whether / how faith is relevant to work
- Share initial work experiences.
- Introduce the topic – Priesthood of All Believers
  - Get initial feedback on participants’ work experience in relation to the topic
  - Ground the topic in Reformed theology and scripture
- As an activity, ask group to consider 2 – 3 ways they can integrate the topic with their work
- Introduce journaling - Ask them to create a journal entry to record their perception of the effect of applying the topic:
  - on themselves, and on others, if any.

#### WEEKS 2-4

- Welcome
- Ask them to journal about their perception of the effect of applying the topic:
  - on themselves, and on others, and their reaction, if any.
- Check-in and group members share their experience of applying the topic of the previous week.
- Group reflects on each person’s experience.
- Introduce the new weekly topic – see below
- Ground the topic in Reformed theology and scripture
- As an activity, ask group to consider 2 – 3 ways they can integrate the topic with their work

#### WEEK 5

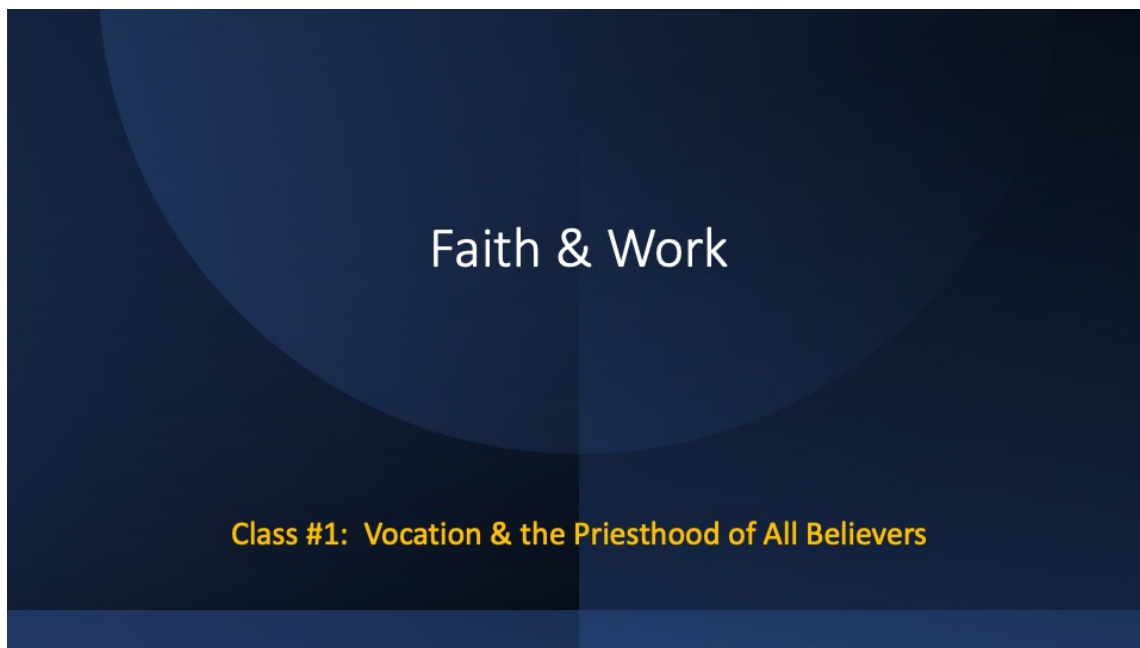
- Check-in and group members share their experience of applying the topic of the previous week.
- Group reflects on each person’s experience.
- Wrap-up conversation – summary and ways to carry this forward
- Final survey

CLASS TOPICS:

- Week 1: Priesthood of All Believers
  - “What does God have to do with work?”
    - All vocations are potentially holy in God’s eyes.
  - What difference might it make if they are holy in our eyes, too?
  
- Week 2: Calling & Giftedness
  - How has God led (called) me to this work, and am I still called to this work?
  - “What gifts has God given me to serve Christ at work?” [
    - Introduce Skills Grid Exercise
    - Importance of Discernment]
  
- Week 3: Purpose of Vocation
  - “How do I serve Christ at work?”
    - [Vocations are for serving neighbors]
  
- Week 4: Eschatological view of work as foreshadowing the Kingdom
  - “Can work and the workplace model the Kingdom?”
  
- Week 5: Wrap-up and overview
  - Complete survey – measure how perceptions have changed.



## APPENDIX 5. Presentation – Class #1



Q. Are some callings more holy than others?



Why or why not?



What makes a calling (vocation / work) holy?

Genesis 1-2:  
God works &  
so do we

#### **Humankind are created in God's image (1:27-29)**

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food...

#### **God does very good work (1:31-2:3)**

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

A second creation story:  
We were  
made to work


#### **God needs someone to till the ground (2:4-5, 15)**

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground . . .

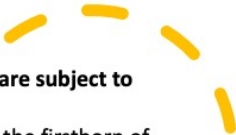
#### **God creates humankind to till the ground in Eden (2:15-16)**

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

**Work is not the penalty for disobedience. Work is inherent to God's vision for human thriving (paradise). We work because God works. Work has dignity and divine mandate.**



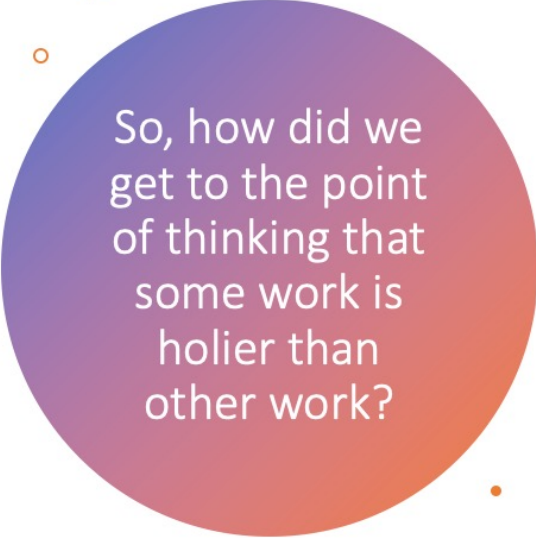
Christ is both  
instrument &  
object of all  
creation



**All things (work and workers, too!) are subject to Christ (Colossians 1:15-17):**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

**If we believe all creation is subject to Christ, then our goal is to help all humans flourish as God intended. Flourishing in our work is a major part of that, and perhaps the way we can have the most influence over our world to make it look more like the Kingdom. Work is witness, holy.**



So, how did we  
get to the point  
of thinking that  
some work is  
holier than  
other work?

**Greek philosophy (Aristotle)**

Active life (work / physical labor) is inferior to the Contemplative life (reflection / mental). Dualism – persists to this day.

**The early church**

Church fathers / mothers withdraw from society to be alone in the wilderness. Become celebrities.

**Medieval Church**

Monastic life becomes the ideal. Laity are less holy than clergy. Hierarchy of holiness.

**Assumption:**

Works have merit in God's eyes . . .

## Protestant Reformation Begins

### Martin Luther

- German monk, convicted by guilt re his continual sinfulness.
  - Asks himself, "How can I ever be righteous in God's eyes? How can I be saved?"
  - Finds answer in Romans 1:17 "the just shall live by faith"
  - Epiphany: Human works - of any sort – can never make us right with God!
- Sets him at odds with the church's teaching that works justify us in God's eyes (e.g. purchasing 'indulgences' reduces time in purgatory)
  - Not the first to argue for reform of church, just the most successful
  - 1517 posts 95 theses



## Reformation spreads like wildfire

### Luther and Calvin

With his followers (esp. John Calvin in Geneva), Luther created irresistible momentum for reform

- Germany, France, Switzerland, Hungary, Netherlands, Scandinavia & Scotland

**Reformed Theology:** "*Sola fides, Sola gratia, Sola scriptura!*"

- Salvation is by faith
  - NOT merit
- Salvation is through grace alone
  - NOT works!
- Scripture is primary authority
  - NOT tradition / church

**Priesthood of ALL believers (primarily Martin Luther):**

- All believers are priests and have access to God through Christ, the true high priest.
- Laypeople have vocations, too – just like priests!



## Priesthood of All Believers

### Basic idea

- All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate
  - one baptism, one gospel, one faith
- We are all consecrated priests through baptism – we just do different work
  - “There is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes, and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work . . . All are truly priests, bishops and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do. Just as all priests and monks do not have the same work.”

## Vocation

### All vocations can be sacred callings

- “A cobbler, a smith, a peasant – each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops.”
  - Romans 12:4-5 - For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.
- NOTE: We will talk about calling & giftedness next week.

## God works through our vocations

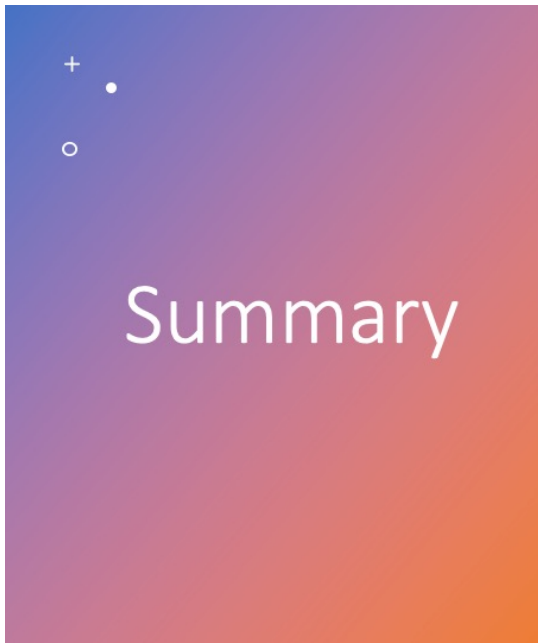
### God works through our vocations

- God works through means, i.e. through humankind in the different areas of our lives.
  - Public (civic government)
  - Religious (church)
  - Home (where most work was done)
- “God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation that is.”
- We all have multiple vocations
  - Bethany: Engineer, Elder, wife, mother, parent, citizen, voter, etc.

## The purpose of our vocations

### All vocations have the same purpose:

- Purpose of every vocation is to serve God and our neighbors
  - “Everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all members of the body serve one another.”
- Our purpose is God’s purpose: to help others flourish.



- 1) All Christians are consecrated as priests at baptism.
- 2) We all have various vocations – all are sacred.
- 3) God works through our vocations.
- 4) All vocations are meant to serve God and others.

## ASSIGNMENT: This week's journal question

- In what ways are (were) you conscious of doing sacred work this week?

- What were the circumstances? (when, what, with whom, etc.)
- How did it feel to do it?

We will spend time journaling about that first thing next week.

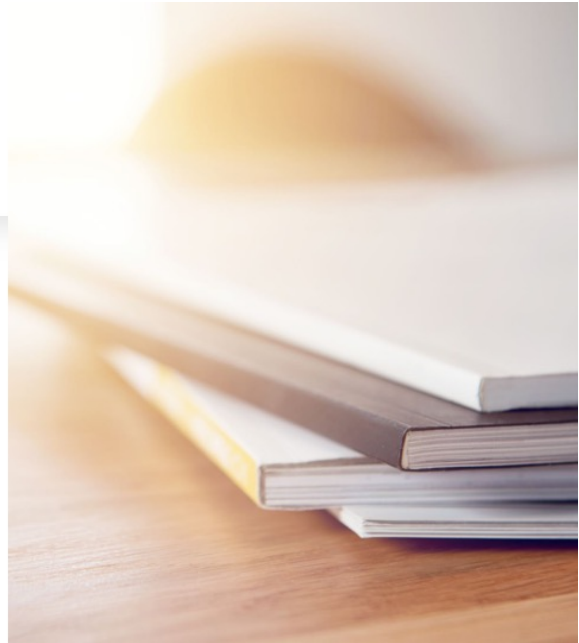
➤ Have a GREAT week!



**APPENDIX 6. Presentation – Class #2****ASSIGNMENT:** Last week's journal prompt

**Q.** In what ways were you conscious of doing sacred work this week?

- What were the circumstances? (when, what, with whom, etc.)
- How did it feel to do it?



## Faith & Work

**Class #2: Calling & Giftedness**



Last week

## Vocation:

- All Christians are consecrated as priests at baptism.
- We all have various vocations – all are sacred.
- God works through our vocations.
- All vocations are meant to serve God and others.

## Group sharing and reflection

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### Ground rules

- Be open – share honestly
- Be curious – ask questions of others, and listen
- Be confidential – nothing goes outside this room.



## This week: Calling & Giftedness

How did God call you to the work you do?

What gifts has God given you to do it?

Scripture:  
God calls us to do his work & God gives us gifts to do it

### **One body, many members with different functions and gifts, to be used for and with one another (Romans 12:4-6)**

<sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and **not all the members have the same function**, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup>We have **gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...**

### **Varieties of gifts, all come from God through the Spirit, intended to serve the Lord (I Corinthians 12:4-)**

<sup>4</sup> Now there are **varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit**; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.** <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>**All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.**

## The take-away

Our vocation (calling) comes from God through the Spirit. (God chooses our vocation, not us!)

The purpose of our vocation is always to serve Christ (even though we may not always see that initially!)

God has given us the gifts to undertake our calling faithfully.

But wait.  
Why then do so many workers lack a sense of vocation?

### 2017 Gallup poll:

- Sample: workers in 160 countries
- Only 15% of the world's workers have a sense of engagement at work.
  - 85% not engaged – lack sense of calling
  - 94% of Japanese workers are not engaged
- In the US:
  - 30% of workers are satisfied
  - 70% of workers are dissatisfied

### 2021 Update – US Dept. of Labor

- As of April 2021, 2.7% of workers left their jobs
- Up from 1.6% year prior

### WSJ Article June 13, 2021:

- “Forget Going Back to the Office – People are just quitting instead.”



Vocation requires *Discernment*: we have to learn to listen to God's call

### God initiates

- Calling does not come with a road map
- God tends to speak in whispers
- It's a process: piece by piece discovery, over time

### We need to listen

- We must learn to distinguish – quiet helps, so does Christian community
- We have to pay attention - to people, events, prayer – and our internal disposition & desires
- We have to test the call!

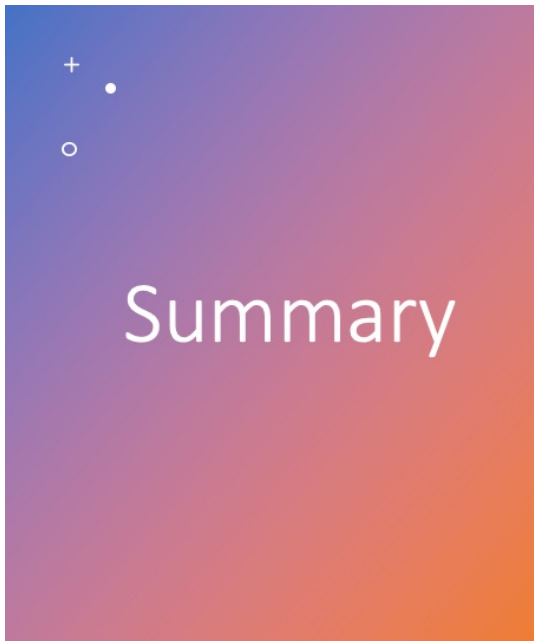
### We have to respond

- Step out in faith – trust God!



**Vocational questions follow us through the various stages of our lives:**

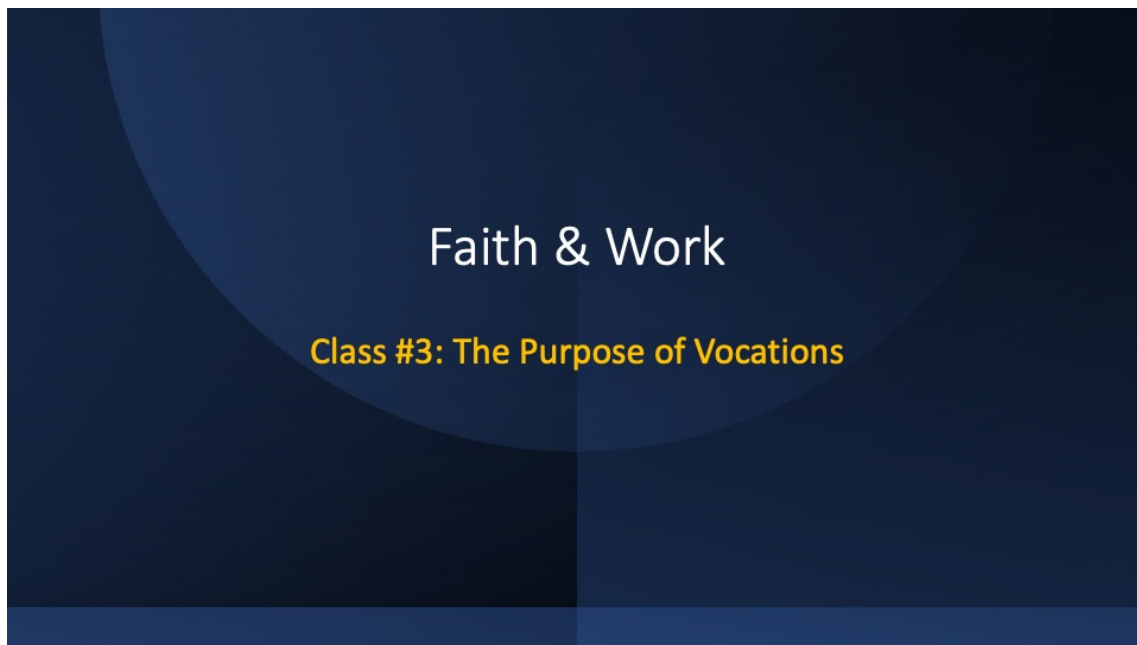
- ❖ College / early career
- ❖ Young adulthood / family years
- ❖ Mid-life - Crisis?
- ❖ Retirement – now what?
  
- ❖ The question: How is God calling me to serve him at this time, in this season of life?



- 1) God gives us our vocation
- 2) The purpose of our vocation is to serve Christ by serving our neighbor.
- 3) God gives us the gifts to undertake our vocation
- 4) Vocation requires discernment
- 5) Vocations can change – so discernment is ongoing



## APPENDIX 7. Presentation - Class #3



Review of Last week:  
Calling & Giftedness

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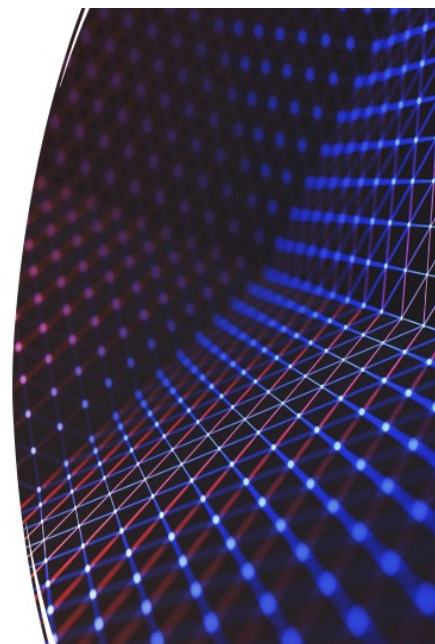
**God gives us our vocation** - God chooses our vocation, not us. We typically don't see his influence until later.

**The purpose of our vocation is to serve Christ by serving our neighbor** - We will focus on this today

**God gives us the gifts to undertake our vocation** - Our gifts are a clue to our vocation.

**Vocation requires discernment** - Listen to people, events, prayer, as well as and our internal disposition & desires

**Vocations can change** - so discernment is ongoing



## This past week's journal prompt

- Is the work you do now your vocation?
- What gifts has God given you to do it?
- Try this exercise:
  - Make a grid – on the vertical y-axis, list the 5 -10 proudest accomplishments in your career, one per row
  - Across the top, list the various skills / gifts that you employed to achieve each accomplishment
  - Tally up how often each skill / gift appears.
- Questions to ask yourself:
  - Do these skills still match up with what it takes to do the work you do now?
  - Does this work still give you fulfillment?
  - What does the result tell you?



## Group sharing and reflection

Ground rules reminder:

- Be **open** – share honestly
- Be **curious** – ask questions of others, and listen
- Be **confidential** – nothing goes outside this room.

# Faith & Work

Class #3: Vocation as serving neighbors

This weeks' topic:

Vocation as serving neighbors

The way we typically frame the question:

How do I serve Christ (i.e. witness to Christ's love) at work?

Reframing the question:

How do I serve others at work?



## Our neighbors' needs

“God does not need  
your good works, but  
your neighbor does.”

— Martin Luther



Scripture:  
One body,  
many members,  
members of one  
another – a living,  
tangible & holy  
sacrifice

### One body, many members, different functions according to differing gifts (Romans 12:1-6)

- <sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- <sup>3</sup>For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup>We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

Scripture:  
 God arranges  
 the members so  
 that all work  
 together in  
 harmony to  
 support and  
 care for one  
 another

**One body, many members working with & for one another (I Corinthians 12:14-26)**

- <sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. . . .
- <sup>24</sup>God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Martin Luther

The purpose of  
 our vocation is  
 to serve others  
 as Christ did:  
 out of love, and  
 rejoicing in the  
 body's well-  
 being

**Commenting on Romans 12:1-6**

- "The suffering and work of Christ is to be viewed in two lights: First, as grace bestowed on us, as a blessing conferred, requiring the exercise of faith on our part and our acceptance of the salvation offered. Second, we are to regard it an example for us to follow; we are to offer up ourselves for our neighbors' benefit and for the honor of God. This offering is the exercise of our love — distributing our works for the benefit of our neighbors.
- "Each member of the body is content with the other members, and rejoices in its powers, not being solicitous as to whether any be superior to itself. For instance, the nose is inferior in office to the eye, yet in the relation they sustain to each other the former is not envious of the latter; rather, it rejoices in the superior function the eye performs. On the other hand, the eye does not despise the nose; it rejoices in all the powers of the other members."

Martin Luther

All members  
serve others  
to benefit the  
body

Commenting on I Corinthians 12:14-26

- "Everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all members of the body serve one another."
- In short, no member lives and acts for itself; all obey and serve one another, and the more honored members serve most... My efforts I direct to serving the body — all the members, my beloved brothers and partners. I assume no peculiarities. I would not cause discord and conflict."

Martin Luther

Good  
management  
enables  
workers to  
serve others

Sermon in the Castle Church at Weimar

- "The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him. That would be a good prince and ruler. When a prince sees his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor...."
- The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living

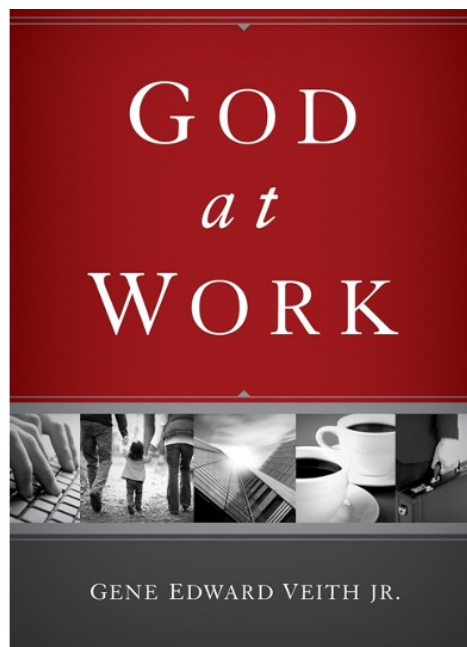
## God works through means: *through our vocations!*

- “Vocations are ‘masks of God.’ On the surface, we see an ordinary human face—our mother, the doctor, the teacher, the waitress, our pastor—but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations.”

-Dr. Gene Veith

- “We pray in the Lord's Prayer that God give us our daily bread, which he does. He does so, not directly as when he gave manna to the Israelites, but through the work of farmers and bakers—and we might add truck drivers and retailers. In effect, the whole economic system is the means by which God gives us our daily bread. Each part of the economic food chain is a vocation, through which God works to distribute his gifts.”

-Dr. Gene Veith



### The take-away

## How we serve others through our vocation

The purpose of our vocation is to serve Christ by serving others

- Though we may not immediately see how we do that
- Even when those we serve are not very Christlike!

Christ is the inspiration and example

- Sacrificial, self-giving service
- Colleagues, customers, suppliers – other neighbors?

It's all about the team – not ego, self-promotion

- All serve everyone – at all levels
- Different gifts / functions need to work together

Management makes that possible & so do we

- Good managers enable workers to use their gifts
- Culture is influenced by individuals, too



## This week's journal prompt

- **Think of 2 or 3 people you are going to serve this week**
  - Do this right now and write the names down on your paper
- **As you serve them, be intentional:**
  - Consider your service to them as your service to Christ, and
  - Christ's service to them – through you.
- **Make notes to yourself (mental or written):**
  - Q. How does that feel?
  - Q. What, if anything changes – in you, in them, your relationship?
  - Q. What might happen to your work culture if that continued?

## APPENDIX 8. Presentation – Class #4

Review of last week:

## How we serve others through our vocation

The purpose of our vocation is to serve Christ by serving others

- Though we may not immediately see how we do that
- Even when those we serve are not very Christlike!

Christ is the inspiration and example

- Sacrificial, self-giving service
- Colleagues, customers, suppliers – other neighbors?

It's all about the team – not ego, self-promotion

- All serve everyone – at all levels
- Different gifts / functions need to work together

Management makes that possible & so do we

- Good managers enable workers to use their gifts
- Culture is influenced by individuals, too

## This past week's journal prompt

- **Think of 2 or 3 people you are going to serve this week**
  - Do this now and write the names down on your paper
- **As you serve them this week, be intentional:**
  - Consider your service to them as your service to Christ, and
  - Christ's service to them – through you.
- **Make notes to yourself (mental or written):**
  - Q. How does that feel?
  - Q. What, if anything changes – in you, in them, your interaction?
  - Q. What might happen to your work culture if that continued?



## Group sharing and reflection

Ground rules reminder:

- Be **open** – share honestly
- Be **curious** – ask questions of others, and listen
- Be **confidential** – nothing goes outside this room.

# Faith & Work

Class #4: Anticipate the Kingdom through our  
Vocation

This weeks' topic:

## Anticipating the Kingdom in the workplace

Q. Can the workplace model  
the Kingdom of God?

Q. Can the workplace  
anticipate the Kingdom?



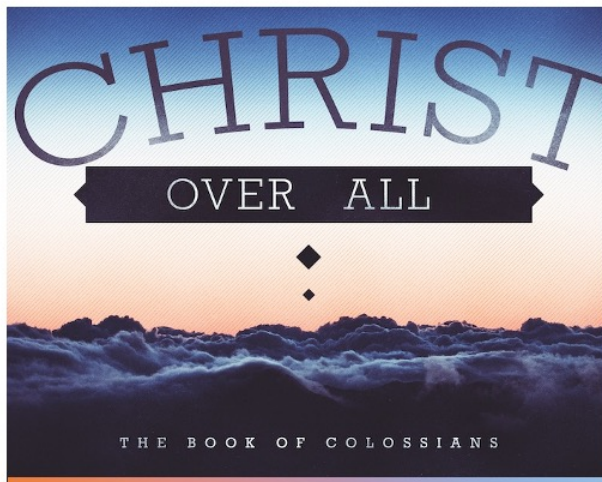


## Genesis: Creation

God intends us to be his partners in his ongoing creative work

### God needs humankind to till the ground (Genesis 2:4-5, 15)

- In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground . . .
- The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.



## Christ: Agent of creation, & all things subject to him

Work and workers, too!

### Colossians 1:15-17:

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

## Christ will return, as King of God's Kingdom :

All things made new – work, too!

### **Romans 14:17 – hallmarks of the Kingdom**

- For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

### **Revelation 21:1-7 – no more pain**

- Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'



### Martin Luther

We anticipate the Kingdom by cooperating with God in his ongoing creation

#### **Sermon on Matthew 6:24-34: "God and Mammon. Do not be anxious"**

- "God gives us the wool, and that he grows on the sheep; but it is not at once cloth, we must labor and make it into cloth; when it is cloth, it does not at once become a coat, the tailor must first work with the cloth before it is a coat; and so God does with all things, he cares for us, but we must toil and work."



## Summary

- The world is God's very good creation:
  - Original creation, and
  - Ongoing creative work
- All things are subject to Christ
  - Work & workers, too!
  - The gospel invites us to see our vocation as a channel for God's love in service to our neighbor
- We are partners in transforming creation to be more like the Kingdom
  - At work, too!
  - We cooperate with God in transforming the world by anticipating the new creation in our workplace



## This week's journal prompt

Assignment: In your workplace, continue to serve 2 -3 people to meet their needs. Be intentional in considering that you are serving Christ by serving them.

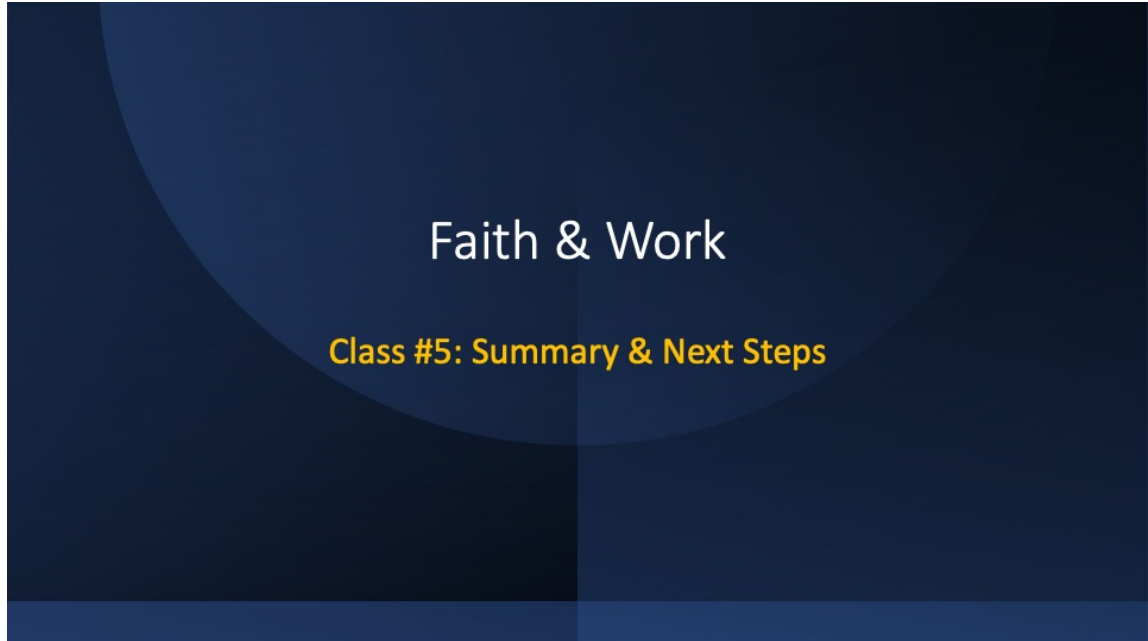
**Q. As you do, what signs do you see in your workplace that the Kingdom may be present, if only partially? In yourself? In others?**

- What glimpses do you get of the Kingdom?
- Kingdom signs: righteous, peaceful, joyous, mutually supportive, cooperative, productive, and caring.

**Q. How does that make you feel?**

- Does this change your sense of being Christ's witness at work?



**APPENDIX 9. Presentation – Class #5**

### Summary of last week

- The world is God's very good creation:
  - Original creation, and
  - Ongoing creative work
- All things are subject to Christ
  - Work & workers, too!
  - The gospel invites us to see our vocation as a channel for God's love in service to our neighbor
- We are partners in transforming creation to be more like the Kingdom
  - At work, too!
  - We cooperate with God in transforming the world by anticipating the new creation in our workplace



## Last week's journal prompt

Assignment: In your workplace, continue to serve 2 -3 people to meet their needs. Be intentional in considering that you are serving Christ by serving them.

**Q. As you do, what signs do you see in your workplace that the Kingdom may be present, if only partially? In yourself? In others?**

- What glimpses do you get of the Kingdom?
- Kingdom signs: righteous, peaceful, joyous, mutually supportive, cooperative, productive, and caring.

**Q. How does that make you feel?**

- Does this change your sense of being Christ's witness at work?



## Group sharing and reflection

Ground rules reminder:

- Be **open** – share honestly
- Be **curious** – ask questions of others, and listen
- Be **confidential** – nothing goes outside this room.

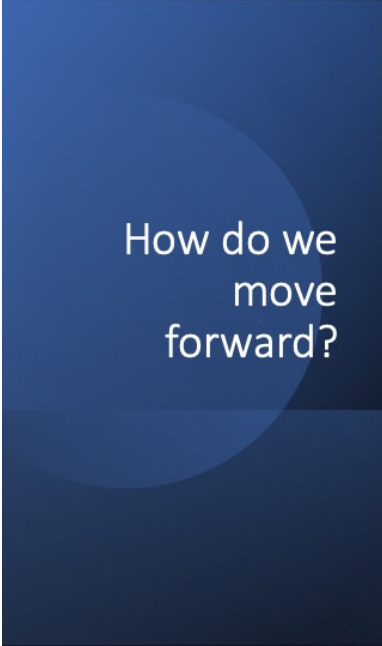
# Faith & Work

## Class #5: Wrap-up



### Summary: Reformed view of vocation

- All our vocations are potentially and equally holy in God's eyes
  - Priesthood of all believers – no divide between secular and sacred vocation. They are all sacred.
  - You do sacred work wherever you are, including at work
- God has given each of us differing gifts, talents, and passions
  - All our gifts are meant to be used together with others
- All vocations are subject to Christ
  - Our work and our workplaces are under the rule of Christ
- Purpose of our vocations is to serve Christ
  - In our work / workplace, we serve Christ by serving others
- Kingdom can be visible through our vocations
  - We cooperate with God's new creation to make the workplace more like Kingdom



How do we  
move  
forward?

## Be intentional

- Remind yourself daily – who, where, how & why
  - Remember who (and whose) you are: You are Christ's disciple and his witness in the workplace
  - Remember where you are placed: God has called you to work where you do
  - Remember how you are made: God has given you specific gifts & passions
  - Remember why you are there: your purpose is to serve Christ by serving others
- Reflect daily
  - How did God work through me today to make his Kingdom real / tangible for others?



## Thank you!

- Survey – please be as objective and candid as possible.
- The results of this survey have no impact on my degree

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