

# *A*polo*gia*: Vocation, the Chance to Serve in Plain Clothes

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## *Introduction:*

I remember late in my high school days when I first decided I wanted to become a pastor. At the time my thinking was this: “I want to do the work of God, it seems like the only work worth doing, so I need to become a pastor.” It turns out, as I learned later, that doing the work of God is not limited to being a pastor. In fact, it is not limited to being any kind of church worker. No, the work of God goes far beyond the scope of the church; it is something that involves all Christians everywhere!

When we talk about the work of God, we often use the word vocation, and rightly so, but where we sometimes make the mistake is when we use the word vocation to mean the same thing as occupation.

While all Christians don’t have the same occupation, they do have the same vocation, which, simply put, is a call from Jesus to faith and to a life of service in Word and deed. Where we miss the mark is in thinking that certain occupations hold the power of the Gospel rather than leaving that, as it should be, to the Holy Spirit who enables us to do the work of God.

## *Scripture Connect*

To best understand this idea of vocation, we must first understand the priesthood of all believers, and to do that best, we look to 1 Peter 2:4-10.

*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:*

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
And the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.*

*Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

*“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone,”*

*and*

*“A stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

In this section of Scripture Peter talks to us about offering spiritual sacrifices to God. Here Peter is referring to the duty of all Christians (the priesthood of all believers) to serve their neighbor in Word and deed. We might call this “doing the right thing,” and this can and should be done by all Christians everywhere whatever the situation may be. However, these aren’t just simple random acts of kindness that Peter is talking about; it goes much further as we talk about the vocation of all Christians.

Vocation for us is not occupation, but ministry! We are to be, as Peter puts it, “living stones” to God. For because of the great sacrifice of the living Stone, our savior Jesus Christ, we now are part of the “holy priesthood” and as priests we are to serve God by spreading the Gospel through the Word and our deeds.

### *Doctrinal Quotation*

In fulfilling our vocation as “priests,” we must not only note carefully the difference between our ministry and random acts of kindness, but also note the importance of the Office of the Ministry and its role in spreading the Gospel of Christ. It is clear throughout Scripture (Acts 13: 1-3, Eph. 4:11ff, 1 Cor. 12:28) that God established the apostles to take part in a particular ministry of publicly proclaiming the Word of God and that the same office is to be upheld today.

This position of public proclamation is apart from others, and unlike the vocation we all have, it is not for everyone. While we want to avoid having a “Hogwarts” state of mind, we must have a way to keep the church organized and to carry out what God has put in place. As Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession reminds us, the Office of the Ministry is a very real thing, as is the congregation’s right to call a shepherd for the flock.

A proper understanding of the vocation that all Christians hold is the most important step in understanding the Office of the Ministry. By realizing that all Christians have a ministry, we are able to know better what it is the pastor and the Office of the Ministry is all about. It is of utmost importance that we understand the link between the priesthood of all believers and ministry and how that relates to vocation if we expect to do the work of God. We have to be able to show this understanding not only when questioned but in the way we conduct our work in this world, so that others can develop the right attitude and understandings. By doing so, it is the hope that those who we minister to can then minister to others in their own life, knowing that they are serving God properly along with the entire body of Christ.

### *Application*

Vocation was an important issue for Luther in his own time and indeed one of the central issues in the Reformation itself. Luther knew all too well that in our vocation of serving God we may or may not cooperate by living a life worthy of being “cornerstones.” Out of this, Luther offered six insights to our opportunities to carry out our vocation and serve our neighbor (Adapted from *The Christian’s Calling* by D. Heiges, Fortress Press):

1. Every Christian has a vocation because of his position in life (roles and relationships with others) and in every position there are opportunities for serving our neighbor.
2. Vocation is often given structure by involving occupations and offices. This structure is commanded by God and they serve necessary purposes despite the fact that sinners sometimes fulfill these occupations.
3. Everything Christians do in vocation (i.e. everything they do in life) is for the sake of their neighbor. Luther put it this way: even the milking of the cow in the morning is clearly vocation because it provides sustenance for others.
4. All service in vocation ranks the same with God, despite the differences in temporal significance.
5. Christians should rejoice in their vocation in the world and should embrace the fact rather than trying to escape it for greater prestige or honor.
6. Education should be encouraged so that all students may adequately be prepared for particular offices within their vocation, not simply being satisfied with life’s given roles. (Contrast with #5)