"What Do You Do All Day?"

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It is possible that every fourth grader in the nation has asked this question. The answers can range from a simple wave off, "Oh, I go to the office" to a complex and rather intricate version, "Well, I go to work in a big building that makes big steel bars soother buildings can be made," all in an effort to cleanly describe a dark, dirty and dangerous steel mill. No matter what the answer, no child would be able to completely understand what their Daddies or Mommies do all day without seeing some concrete evidence of production in their absence from the home. So one parent might take the child to the other parent's workplace, so the child can actually see and experience what his parent does. Some others might take their son or daughter to their own work place and explain to them what every phone call meant or what every word the boss said (or strongly emphasized, yelled) was about. In the process the parents might actually learn something too, because it frequently takes explaining something to someone else to obtain a full grasp on the topic (a convenient study tool). I find myself asking this question of myself as I search for possible calling and vocational options in my college career. What do I want to do all day? There can't be a better way to answer this question than to do a little vocational exploring with someone in the life-path being considered. So I sought out a pastor, theology being my major and ordained ministry being my plans, and was fortunately able to find the Reverend
Doctor Mark Vance. So I ask the question, what does Pastor Vance do all day?

As his titles suggests, he is a Lutheran pastor at Holy Shepard Lutheran Church, ELCA in St. John, Indiana (about 40 minutes west of Valparaiso). Before coming to the pastoral position there, Pastor Vance held other leadership positions in Owensboro, Kentucky (Faith Lutheran Church) and in Batesville, Indiana (St. Mark's Lutheran Church). I asked the Pastor several questions regarding his history in the church and what I got was a wonderful and in depth view of the entire process from college graduation, through his years in the Air Force, up to his time of ordination and entrance into ministry. All of these experiences molded and shaped his sense of calling, which he notes, never really ends. From an early age the ideals of becoming a pastor were instilled in him. “[It] was planted by [Pastor John Fackler,] the pastor who baptized and confirmed me. I rejected it, however, for a variety of reasons. A major one was that my childhood image of God was of a fairly harsh, stern judge, and I could not see myself proclaiming this God’s existence as good news.” I was surprised by the bluntness of his statement but quickly came to realize that everyone’s picture of God was different. For Pastor Vance, it was one that in combination of naivety and confusion clouded his true reception of the external call from his childhood pastor. The tone of the conversation changed. “In college, my image of God became more positive; and I began to reconsider the idea of becoming a pastor.”
Experiences down the road would prove to reawaken an almost dead sense of calling. Taking up positions in the Air Force that would allow him access to scriptures and give him a chance to lead worship services was a friendly, self-initiated wake up call to the ideals still in his mind from long ago. Alice Walker, author of The Color Purple, would have scorned him for not being receptive to the call almost instantly. She “thinks it pisses God off when you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.” Perhaps a bit partial to the color mentioned, Walker does have a point. How rude to walk by something so beautiful and not notice it. How rude to ignore the little nudges at one’s heartstrings and not listen to the call. But does it really “piss” God off when someone is not privy to the call? Most religious organizations would say no. So far we have discussed call as the “pressure” Pastor Vance experienced from colleagues, friends, and others. “Many people affirmed my efforts and encouraged me to consider seminary. I also worked closely with two Lutheran pastors who were starting new congregations in Alaska, and they affirmed my gifts [as well].”

There are two lines of communication within a call of this measure. One is from the community to the potential candidate. The community affirms (pressures) their need for the person’s gifts and recognizes the gifts as possibly very useful guides on their faith journeys. This line has also been referred to as the “external” part of the call. The second line is directly from God. God places His desire in the heart of the candidate expressing something similar to the pleas
of the community. I can imagine it being something like: “Hey you!!! These people are requesting your talents. They want you to help them follow me. So get with it!!!” This “internal” half of the call is probably the most challenging to accept and easiest to ignore. Dr. C. Peter Setzer, a Wegner family friend and pastor at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, urges anyone sensing a call to “fight the Lord with all your might about being a pastor. Then, when in utter exhaustion, you can no longer struggle and STILL feel that call to ministry, then He’s got you!” I participated in my own struggle with the Lord when it came time to seriously consider my major here at VU. I had received the external call from my home congregation and was battling with the internal urge to be a pastor. In my case, the Lord won. In Pastor Vance’s situation “the final decision came during a month-long vocational exploration course I took at LSTC [Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago] in January of 1975.” The call has been answered.

Just like the phone company hires employees to maintain their infrastructure, God uses people to route or guide His call to an individual. Throughout every step in Mark’s life, there were people adding cable to the growing line of calling in his mind. As mentioned before, John Fackler began the process when he baptized and confirmed Mark. When in college, Dan Pierotti connected with Mark as the interim pastor at Mark’s worshipping community. Ernest Lineberger encouraged him during Air Force training in California.
There were two military chaplains, David Lipscomb and Bill Maddox in Alaska; Lowell Stime and Tom Auer, two mission developers in Alaska; David Miller and Arlyn Tolzmann, fieldwork supervisors when Mark was in seminary; maternal grandparents Harold and Neva Haas, helped start the congregation in which he grew up. “They went to worship every week and were heavily involved in congregational life. They gave me a good, positive example of what it means to be steadfast and faithful,” he remarks on his family, proving that those close to Mark were part of the community as well.

Saints are people that do God’s work on earth. We often hear of saints feeding the hungry in Africa or something of that nature. I think it’s fair, however, that we broaden our scope and include people who do work like these folks mentioned above. They did God’s work. They forwarded His message to Mark. Its sounds like they created in him an urge to feed God’s spiritually hungry people. “In His holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints,” comments author Frederick Buechner. God had gotten a brand new set of white linen handkerchiefs that year.

While in college, Mark Vance displayed a fascination with American history and government. “I thought for a long time that I would become a lawyer and ultimately have a career in government service.” With a smile, Pastor Vance refers to the popular Lutheran law vs. gospel concept when he mentions a job in Washington, D.C. as a lawyer’s assistant. Most biblical scholars today now separate the texts
in the Bible as belonging to one of two genres – law or gospel. As a
generalization, law is found mostly in the Old Testament (but not
exclusively so). For example, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy are
all about God’s commandments to the people of Israel. In the New
Testament, Jesus is the gospel – literally translated “good news”.
Pastor Vance’s relation to this theme is in the literal sense: law (actual
profession) versus gospel (actual profession – ministry). He hated all
the paperwork and decided to switch to something less focused on
separateness like divorce hearings and custody battles and more on
togetherness, spreading the good news of God. He said he was more
into the people getting along “thing” than watching or facilitating
people arguing. To this day, though, he remains dubious. “I still have
occasional doubts about whether or not I had chosen the right career.
They came mostly from the fact that my administrative skills are
stronger than my people skills. Some days I would rather be a church
bureaucrat pushing papers than a parish pastor trying to work with
people.” There are always the shining moments in his parish life that
affirms to Mark the truth and goodness of his decision to enter
ministry.

Dealing with conflict is something everyone in every vocation
must face. The same holds true within church profession. Both Pastor
Vance’s and myself have experienced, in our own congregations,
discourse that generally proves to be more hurtful. On one occasion,
he “naively said and did some things that caused the whole place to
blow up.” Mark mentions his first parish in Owensville, Kentucky, and recalls the total unwillingness of the people of the congregation to participate in anything concerning affairs of the church. “A few people were demanding my resignation. One woman said she wouldn’t rest until she saw me committed to an insane asylum.” More often than not, a person comes face to face with the possibility that they may have chosen the wrong path or answered a call in the wrong way. Mark calls himself a reserved, quiet, introverted person and told me that it has sometimes caused issues for his ministry. With his current position at Holy Shepard Lutheran, he has seen many changes throughout his tenure and “each stage of growth has required a different style of ministry.” The trouble adapting to the constant growth has been the source of his reservations about his vocation, but they are quickly extinguished by the positives of the work: “seeing a new building completed, a new family get involved, a new program launched, a crisis resolved, and a life changed.”

Regularity and variety in a job can be attractive aspects or distractions or deterrents for a perspective employee. Pastor Vance experiences both regularity and variety in his role as a parish pastor. It is rather obvious that a sermon must be prepared for every Sunday (obvious as it is commonly associated with pastorship) and all the different parts of the worship service follow a prescribed pattern and change little from week to week (within the same church season). But then there is the phone. He grinned, “the phone rings and there is a
new challenge to meet. Someone asks a question and there is new research to do or a new program to develop.” Not only are there requests from the community, Mark feels the need to continually update and refresh his knowledge of the field. He attends continuing education events frequently. When the monotony of the job does get a handhold on Mark’s life, he has a special way to shake the lethargy away. People tend to associate a pastor with a church, and do not seem to view the ties a church has with another church. Pastor Vance denounces this view and shared his sincere appreciation of the support group he has consisting of other Lutheran pastors as well as the leaders of other ecumenical groups (congregations who strive for complete unity among Christian churches everywhere). So it is easy to become stuck in a rut within your chosen field of work, even if it is something you want or like to do. It is the mark of a truly devoted worker who can continually wade through the low points and find ways to wash away the ruts and holes in the road.

It is an interesting thing Mark does every day. Things change every day, there is variability as well as stability and he is still doing it to this day. That leads me to believe that he likes what he does all day. One’s calling is not an easy task to discuss because it is so private and individualized. Its is reasonably safe to say that no one shares the same calling experience, methodology of answering the call, or response to the call with anyone else. St. Augustine believes, “understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may
believe, but believe that you may understand.” Knowing what the call means is the reward of trusting its message.

"Semper Fi"

Linda Filan

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My nephew, Brian Cavuto, is a twenty-two year old young man who enlisted in the Marines immediately after high school. Through my interview questions and research, I learned about recruiting practices and factors that influence an individual to consider military service as a career. A common thread in my conversations with Brian and in my research is the contrast between the idealities of this vocation and the reality of this work environment. In spite of these contrasts, however, those who choose military service, and in particular the Marine Corps, generally describe their experience as a vocation, and this paper will focus on how this impacts a soldier’s life throughout his career.

Brian told me that he initially decided to enter military service when his college plans were thwarted by economics. He admitted to having other options available, such as entering into the workforce at a minimum wage job and saving for college, but for him, there were others factors that led him to his choice. Certainly the financial incentives offered for new recruits were instrumental in his decision, but there was another reason as well. Brian believed that serving in the