

Fulfilling the Vision of the Life of Faith Initiative

The purpose of the Life of Faith initiative is to stir up a culture change that frees us to make *the service by the baptized in the arenas of daily life* the central focus of the church's mission.

The Normal Paradigm

Our attention is riveted on congregational health and vitality. The standard measure by which that is assessed centers on participation and giving. The purpose of the church focuses on the continued health of congregations. Focusing inwardly causes us to overlook the many and diverse ways that God is at work in our daily lives, for the benefit of our neighbors.

Increased congregational vitality is achieved via talented leaders who implement attractive programming. When we face challenges, we are trained to seek short-term programs that promise to alleviate the challenges. Our limited attention span causes us to continually look for the next program or new idea on the horizon. Meaningful change rarely happens.

Congregations tend to be pastor-centered, and pastoral ministry tends to be congregation-centered. Pastors are rightfully called to proclaim the gospel and to tend to the needs of the congregation, but because their work is largely focused within a congregation, their ability to connect faith to the real, complex realities of their members' lives is limited.

We have not taught God's people to be aware of or to speak specifically about how God is at work in our daily lives for the benefit of our neighbors. We are able to apply our faith to congregational activities with language and examples that are clear, specific, affirming, and supportive. However, accountants and adult children of elderly parents are on their own to figure out how their faith and their daily work are connected.

The Life of Faith Paradigm

Church is not about us (congregations, leaders, or members). The church (*ekklésia*) is God's people called-out of the world for a purpose: to be a blessing to others (Gen. 12:2). This purpose is certainly lived out in and through congregational activities, but we serve as God's hands and feet much more frequently in our daily lives.

Equipping the saints for ministry in the world is not a program. It is not work that is assigned to a few people while everybody else works in other areas. It has to be central to who we are and what we do. Pastors, deacons, and other leaders build and communicate a pervasive sense that our time together is about preparing and empowering us to be sent into the world to love our neighbor.

It is not the pastor's job to know all, see all, and do all. While equipping the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:12) begins with the pastor and permeates the pastor's sense of call, the equipping happens in and among the people. The role of leaders is to build community in such a way that it embodies and empowers the mission and ministry of all God's people in and for the world.

Making the paradigm shift means being specific and concrete about God's activity in our daily lives. When people honestly wrestle with the question, "What does it mean that I am called in my daily life?", pastors are not the primary answer-givers, as they likely have never experienced the specific callings of members (e.g., CEOs or retail workers). Congregations become communities that invite people to wrestle together over the complex realities of their daily lives.

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The language we use is often vague or multivalent. Our liturgy, hymnody, Bible studies, and sermons seek to connect our faith to our daily lives, but most often our language and our examples are not grounded in specific realities. Prayers like “bring forth from us a harvest of righteousness and sheaves of wisdom and justice” are difficult to connect with real life. As a result, people struggle to describe the Christian life as being anything more than being nice, living ethically, or volunteering for worthy causes.

The most common definition of ministry is that it is “something extra” (above and beyond our daily roles and responsibilities). While the priesthood of all believers and baptismal vocation are central to our Lutheran identity, we often assume that the important work of the priesthood of all believers takes place within or through our congregations.

We assume that joy and fulfillment will come when our programs are flourishing and our buildings are overflowing with people. In order to achieve that goal, we keep asking people to do “something more” for the church, even though we know they are likely to say they are too busy. In the process, we burn out both leaders and members.

The church’s task is to define and teach language that expresses our core beliefs and makes the connection between faith and life. “If a congregation no longer has the language to name the narrative controlling it, the congregation is held captive by what it cannot name.”¹ Focusing deeply and over a long period of time on Luther’s understanding of vocation is critical to overcoming the gap between faith and life.

Ministry is not something we do for God, if we have the time and interest. Ministry is what God in Christ is doing through us—especially in our daily activities—to provide for the daily needs of our neighbors. “If you find yourself in a work by which you accomplish something good for God, or the holy, or yourself, but not for your neighbor alone, then you should know that that work is not a good work.”²

The vision of the Life of Faith Initiative holds incredible promise! When service by the baptized in the arenas of daily life is the central focus of the church’s mission, burdens will be lifted from the shoulders of our leaders and joy will abound. Instead of perpetually seeking another program that promises to renew our congregations, we will be free to focus on God’s already abundant activity in our lives for the benefit of our neighbors.



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1. Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 73.

2. Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 120. This is Wingren’s translation of the (as yet not published in English) Adventspostille of 1522 from the Weimar Edition 10 1, 2, 41.