

# ADVENT LUTHERAN CHURCH

## NEWSLETTER MAY 2024

### VOCATION 101

REV. JOSEPH  
SCHATTAUER  
PAILLÉ

*I was going to combine late April and May into a single newsletter, but I decided to send out another one since there are some new additions for you to be aware of. What's below is adapted from our 2022 Lenten homily series on Lutheran basics.*

The word vocation comes from the word “calling.” The root comes from vox or voice. To have a vocation is to be called by God to do something. Around the time of the Reformation, the common view was that vocations were something that priests and nuns had. You can imagine the mental model here. Some small percentage of people are called by the voice of God to become priests and nuns. And then they go off somewhere and do the spiritually significant stuff while everyone else just sort of does normal life.

From that mental model, you can spin out a few assumptions about vocation. One is that some small group of people have vocations. Most people don't. Another is that vocation is ultimately about work. If you work as a priest, you have a vocation. If you work as a tradesman, you don't have a vocation. And another is that vocation assumes a hierarchy. God calls some people to be nuns, but God doesn't call anyone to be a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker. So it's better to be a nun.

Few of us would buy into the medieval view wholesale, but you can still see the residue of it on our thinking. First, we often assume that work is the primary means of identity formation. When someone refers to the “real world” they mean work. Markets determine what's real. Second, we often assume that clergy have some unique relationship with God that other people don't have. The word for this is “clericalism,” and you can find a lot of it even in Protestant circles. And third, we often assume that only some group of people does really important things in life while everyone else just sort of gets through the day.

The Lutheran expression of vocation gets rid of all that. It turns it on its head. And it does that by relocating where the calling of God happens. Remember, in the old model the voice, the vox, comes out of the blue part of the way through people's lives. But in our tradition, the voice of God calls people through their baptisms.

So how can you use this vocation tool in your life? Well, one way is to clarify how we make decisions about our lives. Imagine that you're trying to make some Big Life Choice. Should you work or retire? Should you take care of a relative? Should you have kids or not? Should you relocate? When you're making those choices, it can be tempting to think there is one correct answer that God is calling you to. Our understanding of vocation gets rid of that. And it says that one choice might make you happier or improve your relationships or be more prestigious or be more interesting. But there is no one choice that is going to cut you off from participating in God's mission in the world. Peace and courage.

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**CFA ITEM OF THE MONTH**

DIANE HAVENS

We have long been enthusiastic supporters of the Center for Food Action whose mission it is to “prevent hunger and homelessness and improve the lives of individuals and families living in poverty.” As food prices continue to be a burden on the most vulnerable, we’d like to increase our donations to this cause. To accomplish this goal, we are going to have monthly items identified by CFA to be those most regularly in need. This month we are requesting breakfast cereals, oatmeal, and waffle mix.

Thanks, as always, for your incredible ongoing generosity!



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**ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS**

DIANE HAVENS

To continue to nurture the arts in our community, we’d like to have a visual art and poetry showcase this spring or early summer (date TBD). The theme would be one of hope, joy, a celebration or meditation on nature. If you or someone you know has created art work or written poetry, we’d love to share it here as a special event — a combination art show and poetry reading. I would also like to include poems that are especially meaningful to you, or simply that you love, as part of the showcase. For questions and more information please write or speak to Diane Havens ([d52havens@gmail.com](mailto:d52havens@gmail.com)).



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**SYNOD ASSEMBLY**

New Jersey Synod Assembly will be held on Saturday, May 11 at Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton. We are past the early registration deadline, but please keep our synod in your prayers as we meet for our annual meeting. A summary will be available once the assembly is complete.



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**GODLY PLAY FOR MAY**

On Sunday, May 19, our Godly Play kids will meet after worship to assembly snacks packs for the Center for Food Action. You do not need to bring anything to participate. This is funded in part through a Thrivent grant from Christine Keeler. Thank you!



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**WYCKOFF DAY**

Wyckoff Day is Saturday, June 1. We could use some folks to work our table for an hour or two. Please let me know if you’re interested.

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**MEMORIAL DAY**

We will have a wreath at our town’s Memorial Day commemoration. The ceremony begins at 10 AM outside Wyckoff Reformed.

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## NEHEMIAH: A PRAYERFUL MAN

GERRY LAURO

*“Separating life into distinct categories of sacred and secular damages, sometimes irreversibly any attempt to live a whole and satisfying life, a coherent life with meaning and purpose, a life lived to the glory of God.”- Eugene Peterson writing in “The Message”*

Can one man really make a difference? In the case of Nehemiah, that most certainly rings true. However ascribing superpowers to him discredits the message he delivers to us. He’s not a super being, but a devoted man of God you pray and determine how to help his people. I have written about him before, but am drawn to examine him again from a new angle, that of a role model.

Following the exodus Jews in Babylon were forced to find their own way to support themselves, and many became very successful and indeed became a major part of the Babylonian economy. Nehemiah was emblematic of that, becoming the king’s cupbearer. That position was one of extreme trust because that person was responsible for the King’s safety. As such it was not unusual for the king and his cupbearer to become close on a personal basis. From a worldly perspective, Nehemiah had it made. He was a highly placed official within the king’s court. Despite this, Nehemiah as a Jew cared about life in Jerusalem, especially after hearing his brother’s grim report upon his return from the Holy Land. Lacking a wall, Jews could not feel safe in their home city. Morale and conditions were poor.

Desperate to aid his countrymen, Nehemiah took time to ask God how to handle things rather than precipitate action without careful thought. He could have just run to the King and blurted something out, but instead he analyzed things carefully and waited until God inspired him to do so. When the moment was right, the King not only gave him permission to go, but allowed him access to supplies to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem he waited several days, getting the lay of the land before arising in the middle of the night with his colleagues to assess what needed to be done. Then he employed leadership skills to unify the Jews. His solution was simple and elegant: each individual family would take a portion of the wall as their own project and just rebuild that particular section. So the Goldsmith guild, other merchants, wealthy families, and even poor families lent a hand in rebuilding the wall.

The project initially went well, however needless to say there was opposition to what was being done. The “establishment” in the area took a dim view of the project since a strong wall would help support and strengthen the returning Jews. Initial derision turned to outright hostility. Through it all, Nehemiah asked God for wisdom and dealt with the problems. He later worked with the priest and scholar Ezra who united the priesthood behind the project.

Despite all opposition, in 52 days the Wall was completed. To commemorate the project Ezra called the people to the town square and read from the five books of Moses. Not only did he read, he also explained the meaning, adding spiritual growth to the individuals. Excited by what they heard the people on their own, reconfirmed their commitment to God, and all signed a document reaffirming the Abrahamic covenant.

His work completed, Nehemiah returned to Babylon. He later returned to Jerusalem to find the people and the priests had begun sinning again. He “cracked the whip” and restored God’s order.

So what can we learn from Nehemiah? Take your time to pray and visualize what you need to do. Ask God for inspiration and timing. Consult our clergy for help, don’t be afraid but believe God will support you and use your natural abilities to complete your task. It worked in the past and it will work for you today. God is still in business!

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**MAY  
AT A GLANCE**

Thursday, May 1	10 AM	The Gospels for Everyone/Bible study
Saturday, May 4	5 PM	Worship (JSP away. Rev. Miller presides)
Sunday, May 5	9:30 AM	Worship (JSP away)
Thursday, May 8	10 AM	The Gospels for Everyone/Bible study
Saturday, May 11	Synod Assembly in Hamilton 5 PM	Worship
Sunday, May 12	9:30 AM	Worship
Wednesday, May 14	7:30 PM	Hope and Healing Meeting
Thursday, May 15	10 AM	The Gospels for Everyone/Bible study
Saturday, May 18	5 PM	Worship
Sunday, May 19	9:30 AM 10:45 AM	Worship Godly Play
Monday, May 20	1 PM	Book Group
Wednesday, May 22	6 PM	Grief Support (Note earlier date)
Thursday, May 23	10 AM	The Gospels for Everyone/Bible study
Saturday, May 25	5 PM	Worship*
Sunday, May 26	9:30 AM	Worship*
Monday, May 27	10 AM	Town Memorial Day commemoration
Thursday, May 30	10 AM	The Gospels for Everyone/Bible study

\* I will be away May 4/5 and 25/26 to handle some family stuff. I will get you more information on how worship will work those weekends once I have more information. I can tell you that Rev. Paul Miller will preach and preside on Saturday, May 4.