

An outward-facing Lent

BY JULIA SEYMOUR

MOST OF US ARE USED TO the season of Lent having a slower pace. We sing songs in minor keys. Many of our prayers turn us inward, reflecting on the reality of individual sin and the ways in which we may feel far from God. While these practices are not incorrect, they are somewhat out of step with this truth: Christianity is a community faith.

With rare exceptions, Christians are called to support

one another and to be out in the world as stewards of creation and good neighbors to all we meet. The Holy Spirit helps us balance our baptismal callings to be still and know God, and to be the hands and feet of God in the world.

As Lutheran Christians, we have a particular—perhaps even peculiar—view of vocation. While “vocation” is often the word used for paid work, Martin Luther and

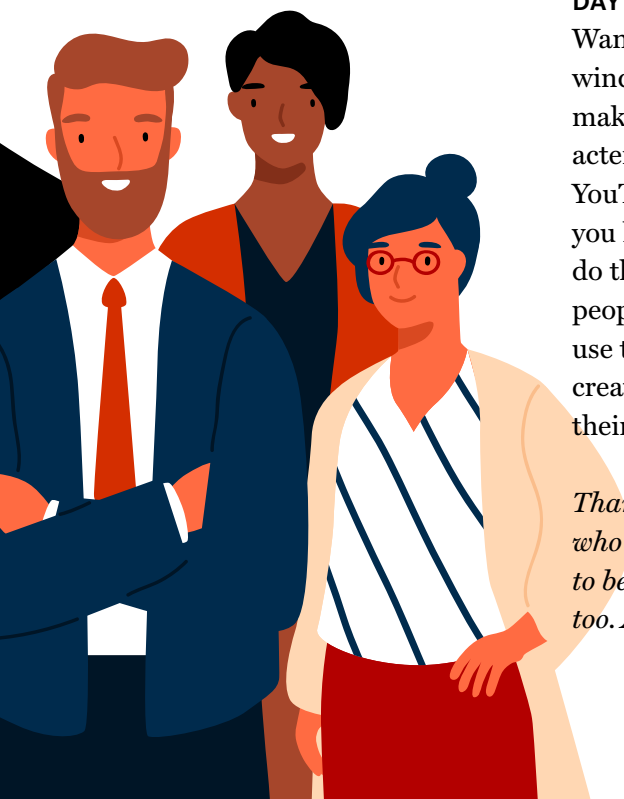
his spiritual descendants also use “vocation” to refer to all kinds of roles we take on as baptized people. In addition to paid occupational work, we have the vocations of family roles, volunteering, neighborhood and community participation, creation care, friendship and citizenship.

Use this Lenten devotional (published in the January/February, March and April issues of *Gather*) with any age group



to explore the fullness of what vocation means. Let's take time over these 40 days of Lent to pray for others and for ourselves. Sometimes we will reflect on occupations we tend to forget, but that make our lives possible. At other times we'll ponder the roles we take on throughout life, and how God uses these vocational roles to shape us and others.

We do not arrive at the resurrection alone, but surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—saints who have gone before us and those still at work beside us. This Lent, let's join together in outward-facing prayer, asking God to guide us in our vocational understanding and to help us see Christ's presence and power in all people.



DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, FEB. 17

We often take for granted how easily we can flush away things we would rather not see. We also know how quickly plumbing problems can become very bad. Plumbers, septic tank pumpers and wastewater treatment plant workers make our homes and communities sanitary and livable. Their work mirrors God's help, lifting us out of the muck created by bad choices and things that just happen.

Dear God, thank you for people whose work it is to deal with our waste and keep our communities clean. Thank you for doing the same in our hearts. Amen.

DAY 2: THURSDAY, FEB. 18

Want to learn how to change windshield wipers, use eye makeup or make cartoon character cupcakes? Someone on YouTube has made a video to help you learn, step by step, how to do that very thing. All kinds of people, even those of us who don't use the internet, benefit from the creativity of YouTube artists and their how-to videos.

Thank you, loving God, for those who share how-to videos. Help me to be generous with what I can do too. Amen.

DAY 3: FRIDAY, FEB. 19

Aunts and uncles are not always blood relatives. Sometimes they are grown-up friends of the family, providing support and love. Families are rarely simple, which helps us remember the vastness of God's love in the world and the many ways divine love embraces all creation.

Holy Parent of us all, we thank you for the aunts and uncles in our lives. The family you create through your love is the largest of all. We are grateful to be in it through Christ. Amen.

DAY 4: SATURDAY, FEB. 20

With their vials and needles, phlebotomists draw blood samples, which are used to determine the health and needs of our bodies. They have to deal with people's anxieties, worries and grief while carefully completing their tasks. God's mercy in the world is present in what is seen and unseen. Those whose vocations help reveal mysteries and bring healing are participants in God's mercy becoming known on earth, just as it is in heaven.

Gracious God, thank you for people whose vocations help reveal mysteries and bring healing. Amen.

DAY 5: MONDAY, FEB. 22

Altos, basses and baritones most often sing supporting notes, doing the work of harmony. While we may admire and remember the melody of the soprano or tenor voice, the support of harmony gives music its fullness and depth. Vocations of harmony and support matter, in music and beyond.

God of sounds, help me perceive and participate in the harmonies of creation and community. Amen.

DAY 6: TUESDAY, FEB. 23

While most of us sleep, the night is full of people preparing food, cleaning buildings, stocking shelves and driving trucks. The Holy Spirit watches over all who keep moving, even in the dark, so we may wake to food, deliveries and clean spaces each morning.

God of all time, bless those who work at night. Make your presence known to them in clear and tangible ways. Amen.

DAY 7: WEDNESDAY, FEB. 24

Line workers install and repair our electrical lines and

distribution systems. Their work keeps our lights on, our heat going, our water running. Many are on teams that travel to places where storms or disasters have disrupted power. While people connected in Christ can never truly be separated, the gift of connection through electricity has become more important over time.

Connector of all, thank you for people whose vocations keep us comfortable and connected. Amen.

DAY 8: THURSDAY, FEB. 25

The bread and wine at communion carry Christ's presence to us. These elements also connect us to the people who grew the grapes, planted the wheat, built the barrels and shaped the bread. The Holy Spirit is present from the beginning to the end of the process. In communing with bread and wine, we are connected to Jesus and to everyone who works to bring these elements from God's earth.

Creator, we thank you for gift of communion. Bless the people who work to bring these elements into our hands. Amen.

DAY 9: FRIDAY, FEB. 26

Pretty parks and peaceful cemeteries represent the work of dedicated landscapers and groundskeepers. They weed, mow, plant and tend so we may have beautiful public spaces. Beautiful spaces and parks remind us of God's gardens—in Eden, around the empty tomb and in heaven. When we find peace in a well-kept space, we experience how things are meant to be.

God, thank you for people who tend our public spaces. Help us find moments of peace in your garden of creation today. Amen.

DAY 10: SATURDAY, FEB. 27

Sharing one's space with a beloved pet can bring support and peace. In this way, the animals we care for also take care of us. When we share pets with others, through visits or just a pat in passing, this mutual comfort creates community. Caring for pets gives us a glimpse of unconditional love.

Dear God, we thank you for the opportunity to care for animals and to receive their love in return. Amen.

DAY 11: MONDAY, MARCH 1

While we most often use maps for driving or walking directions, cartographers make maps of mountains, deserts and even the ocean floor. Maps show where we can go and where we cannot. Mapmakers help us understand our world and its possibilities. Scripture is a map too. It shows us how God has been at work in the past and what God is likely doing today.

God of all places, bless the mapmakers who help us travel safely and explore new areas, in the world and in Scripture. Amen.

DAY 12: TUESDAY, MARCH 2

Morticians care for the bodies of those who have died. With gentle hands, they wash, embalm and dress our loved ones. With kind hearts, they do the work of cremation. This is truly the work of merciful people—to treat the dead with respect and to comfort the living. The Spirit is evident in all who do this work with love.

Bless, O God, those who care for the dead. May they receive comfort and peace in the same measure that they give to others. Amen.

Note to readers: Look for more devotions in the March issue of *Gather*. 🌿



TRANSFORMED COMMUNITY: FREED AND EMPOWERED FOR RADICAL WELCOME

Bring your community together through this six-session study to discern your relationship with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through a biblical lens. Centered on Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,” this series will help you explore stories of generosity, inclusion, compassion, justice, and forgiveness and learn more ways to act as God’s agents of change in the world.

Together, in partnership with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries.

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THIS MONTH, WE CONTINUE with “An outward-facing Lent,” a Lenten devotional series that began with days 1-12 in the January/February 2021 issue. We may be used to taking time during the Lenten season for inward reflection and contemplation. Adding these outward-facing daily devotions reminds us that we are never alone in our Christian journey. The Holy Spirit connects us to other people and to creation in ways beyond our imagination. Opening our prayer lives to reflection and supplication for others helps us to consider our own contributions in the world.

DAY 13: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3
Mechanics use their gift of spatial awareness and understanding to shift, repair and build engines, machinery and tools. Their work creates a hum of traffic, heating and cooling systems, and other equipment. Their work is the background noise of our lives. How often we take for granted the gifts of this work, which creates the baseline of normal for many people.

Repairing God, we glimpse your mystery in the interconnectedness of all things. Bless those who work to keep many things operational and safe. Amen.

DAY 14: THURSDAY, MARCH 4

From piles of paper, fabric, yarn, paint, glue sticks, beads and more, those with the gift of crafting make beautiful, inspiring work. Their talents decorate homes, cover beds and warm bodies. Their creations draw our attention toward the One who makes all things, seen and unseen.

Holy God, you knit all things together in your love. Guide us to our own inspired work by the beauty of your creation. Amen.

DAY 15: FRIDAY, MARCH 5

Hospice workers are holy witnesses to the journey of dying. They help families and friends understand and be present to a life passing. Their work guides our understanding of a good

death as part of a blessed life.

God of life, death and resurrection, we thank you for your presence in all the stages of life. Bless those whose work includes being present for those moving from this life into the next. Amen.

DAY 16: SATURDAY, MARCH 6

The Bible tells us that God knows every hair on our heads. We give great trust to those who trim, curl, shave and shape those hairs. Barbers and hairdressers often listen to their clients, offering counsel and consolation alongside the paid services.

Bless, O God, those whose work includes both grooming and companionship of others. Amen.



DAY 17: MONDAY, MARCH 8

Park rangers hike the trails, view the animals and stay alert to changes in the land that others may never experience. Their dedication preserves the shared natural resources that belong to all people. They work on behalf of people whom they may never meet and who may never recognize their work, but who benefit from it all the same.

God, we thank you for those who work on our behalf to care for your creation. Amen.

DAY 18: TUESDAY, MARCH 9

Many people receive nourishment from food banks and similar food programs. Volunteers in food programs are part of how God distributes daily bread. Those working in food and meal distribution are doing God's work with their hands.

God of plenty, we thank you for those who are dedicated to making sure others receive all the blessings you intend for your children. Amen.

DAY 19: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

Every day millions of trucks deliver food, mail and other goods around the world. Delivery and long-haul truck drivers spend long hours sitting, moving goods and hopping in and out of their vehicles. Every package on a shelf represents the many transportation workers who labored to get it there.

Holy God, protect those whose vocation is transportation. Keep them alert, awake and safe in all they do. Amen.

DAY 20: THURSDAY, MARCH 11

From quilt shops to independent bookstores to consultants, small business owners work for themselves while trying to provide goods and services to others. Without the safety net of corporate infrastructure, they take necessary and calculated risks to bring creativity and diversity into the business community.

We give you thanks, O God, for small business owners whose pursuits create possibility and creativity in all communities. Amen.

DAY 21: FRIDAY, MARCH 12

Librarians do more than organize, read and recommend

books. They help people complete job applications, navigate new towns, and research local and family history. Librarians are willing to carry and be part of the stories of their community. Their work holds space in the present for both the past and the future.

Dear Jesus, through you we are all included in God's story of love and healing for the whole creation. Thank you for those who help carry our stories. Amen.

DAY 22: SATURDAY, MARCH 13

Community gardens offer space for people to grow food for themselves and others. In working with soil, plants and water, we learn about God's call to us to be co-creators of life, beauty and joy. Those who organize, volunteer in and cultivate community gardens see grace in each shoot, pod and bloom.

Spirit of God, you moved in the beginning of all things—bringing forth order and beauty. Bless the gardens of the world that feed both bodies and souls. Amen.

DAY 23: MONDAY, MARCH 15

Administrators keep things moving in schools, healthcare facilities and offices. Beyond answering phones, they juggle schedules, building use and budgets. They memorize faces and names. They



know the emergency plans by heart. Keeping things running smoothly is a dance of grace that often goes unnoticed.

Loving God, you have set all things in order according to your purposes. Guide us that we may cooperate with your gracious will for the flourishing of peace in our world. Amen.

DAY 24: TUESDAY, MARCH 16

Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, was a carpenter. Like many in that job today, he likely built window and door frames, crafted small furniture, and repaired stairs and ladders. The work of carpentry blends utility and artistry, moving from rough, raw wood to useful finished products.

Shape us in your image, Jesus, that we may be useful to the will of your Holy Parent in the world. Amen.

DAY 25: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17

A grocery store is a busy place and rarely empty. During the day, cashiers, managers and department clerks are constantly at work. At night, stockers empty boxes and move displays, while janitors clean. All this work is part of how food gets from farms to our tables.

Dear God, bless those whose work provides access to food for others. Amen.

DAY 26: THURSDAY, MARCH 18

There are many reasons people need or want wigs. People with medical conditions, like alopecia, may not grow hair. Some medical treatments cause people's hair to fall out. Some cultural and religious traditions value and encourage wigs. Skilled wigmakers bring comfort and joy to all kinds of people, across ages, races and creeds.

Bless wigmakers, dear Lord, in their vocation of numbering hairs for each head their work will cover. Amen.

DAY 27: FRIDAY, MARCH 19

The job description of a teacher's aide is probably best summed up by "all duties as assigned." From making copies to helping individual students to supervising playgrounds, aides bring efficiency and greater functionality to classrooms and schools. Those who do full-time work are often compensated as part-time employees in both pay and benefits.

Jesus, we seek your blessing on those whose work facilitates learning in schools. Encourage them in their vocations and keep them safe. Amen.

DAY 28: SATURDAY, MARCH 20

Many rural, some suburban and a few urban areas rely on volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel. These trained volunteers are willing to take shifts and be on alert to help neighbors and strangers through some of life's most difficult moments. Taking their scheduled turns, they never know what each phone call will bring. Their willingness to intercede and bring help is a blessing to their communities.

God of hope and help, safeguard those willing to put their lives on the line for their communities, especially volunteer firefighters and emergency service personnel. Amen.

DAY 29: MONDAY, MARCH 22

For nearly anything we can buy, there are people who first try it out. Is the combination of fibers too itchy? How long do these batteries last? How does this flavor of chips taste? Is this joke funny enough or at all? Product testers stand in for all of us to check everything from car interiors to food to TV shows. We may complain about their work when we don't like a particular item, but we often forget that their input helped shape so many things we use and appreciate.

Spirit of grace, thank you for people who test products before we ever see them. They offer feedback

to improve things in ways beyond our imaginations. Amen.

DAY 30: TUESDAY, MARCH 23

In Exodus 1, two midwives named Shiphrah and Puah trick Pharaoh and save a generation of Israelite babies. Today midwives might not have to be tricky, but otherwise they do the same work. They accompany pregnant people on their journey to becoming parents, through giving birth and afterward. Midwives also accompany expectant parents when the story doesn't end as hoped. Their dedication gives glory to God, who is attentive to the world's labor pains in becoming what the world is meant to be.

We live in hope, O God, for safe delivery from all our fears and from external threats. Amen.

DAY 31: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

At any given point in time, someone somewhere is cooking for others. In prisons, in hospitals, in factories, on military installations, in homes, everyone needs to eat, and someone has to prepare the food. A cook makes lunch while thinking about dinner and makes dinner while thinking about breakfast. And just like Jesus, they stretch small quantities of food to nourish many.

From loaves and fish to pans of lasagna, we give you thanks, dear Lord, for all who work to feed others, from one hungry person to a gathering of thousands. Amen.

DAY 32: THURSDAY, MARCH 25

Opticians design and fit the tools needed to correct vision, like eyeglasses and contact lenses. Hearing aid specialists help people select the best tools to improve their hearing. People with these vocations help others adapt to new realities of vision or hearing loss. Their work requires sensitivity, patience and an encouraging attitude.

Lord of life, you know the ebb and flow of our senses. Be with those whose work it is to care for our senses. Strengthen our spirits, that we may perceive others and the world around us through your love and compassion. Amen.

DAY 33: FRIDAY, MARCH 26

A good coach praises what is going well, gently corrects what is flawed, and inspires us about what can be. No longer limited to athletics, coaches are available for life transitions, academic subjects and professional development. Being coached helps us see ourselves through someone else's eyes—and know that we are worthy of time, attention and discipline.

Coaching God, you love us as we are, and still your Spirit helps us become ever more fully the people you have made and called us to be. Amen.

DAY 34: SATURDAY, MARCH 27

“Domestic engineer” is a modern, formal title for someone we once called a stay-at-home parent or house spouse. This new label attempts to honor the breadth of work done to maintain a household. This work includes, but is not limited to budgeting, calendar keeping, facilities maintenance, menu planning and execution, and laundry. The unpaid labor of domestic engineering makes possible everything else that happens in a household.

Jesus, you looked with love on Martha of Bethany, whose work made others feel comfortable and cared for. Grant your peace to domestic engineers whose work makes shelters into homes. Amen. 🌿

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LENT IS A TIME OF REFLECTION on Jesus' movement—down the mountain from the Transfiguration, through the last days of his ministry, up the hill of Golgotha. It is also a time when we can prepare for Easter joy by praying for others and their vocations. God grants all of us many vocations—paid and unpaid work, volunteering, family roles and citizenship expectations. Our fulfilling of these roles is part of how the Holy Spirit accomplishes God's will on earth as in heaven.

We end our Lenten series with these devotions for Holy Week and Easter Day:

DAY 35: HOLY MONDAY, MARCH 29

Music instructors and band directors take on the task of teaching music and music appreciation. Teaching music includes aspects of mathematics, biology and history. Community singing and playing instruments together can create space where, through the music, people begin to breathe in sync with one another, becoming more than the sum of the parts.

Holy God, all praise and honor is due to you. Let the songs of

our hearts, our mouths and our instruments give glory to you and to your powerful presence of love in the world. Amen.

DAY 36: HOLY TUESDAY, MARCH 30

Veterinarians and vet techs care for the nonhuman members of our families. They treat birds, cats, dogs, horses, fish, rabbits, ferrets and animals that we might not have even considered petting, much less bringing home. Not only do they care for our furry, feathered and scaled beloveds; people with this vocation also take on the task of relieving the suffering of our pets when it is time to let them go.

God of all creatures, bless those who care for animals, especially family pets. Give them joy and encouragement in all they do as stewards of this part of your creation. Amen.

DAY 37: HOLY WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

From restaurants to houses, from bridges to food, inspectors ensure

that structures and resources are safe. Carrying long lists of regulations and a desire for people to safely flourish, inspectors fulfill their vocation with hope for the future. Just like our Creator, they anticipate the opportunity to look and say, "It is good."

Spirit of creation, we thank you for the work of inspectors. While we do not see their work, they fulfill their vocations with us in mind. Amen.

DAY 38: MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 1

Cosmetologists can do any of a variety of tasks—from cutting hair to nail services to makeup. Their touch may be the only human contact some of their clients receive. Their willingness to kneel down to wash another's feet or provide a makeover in a time of grief is a holy vocation that brings peace and consolation to those who receive their care.

Thank you, Jesus, for those who are willing to care for the bodies of others. This week, we are especially grateful for those who wash

and tend the hands and feet of others. Amen.

DAY 39: GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 2

It's easy to forget that everything we buy in a store has been touched by others we will never see. In particular, we tend to forget the people who made these items. Whether doing the work by hand or watching over a machine, people in factories all over the world produce our clothes, toys, cars, school supplies and nearly everything that is not food. All too often, to keep production costs low, these workers suffer low wages, forced overtime and

unsafe conditions.

We pray, dear God, for those who work in factories. We ask that they may have safe working conditions, fair pay and a sense of value in all they do. Amen.

DAY 40: HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 3

The vocation of storytelling is one of the oldest in the world. The one who tells a story is trying to make sense of the world. Stories, both fiction and nonfiction, help us think differently about ourselves, other people and the world beyond our imagination. This week, as we celebrate the

high point of the greatest story ever told, let us give thanks for all who have kept the story of God's faithfulness alive from generation to generation.

God of love, you are the author of the story of creation. Thank you for including us in your story. Thank you for all who have given their lives and energy to telling your story in the past, present and time to come. We await the time when our faith becomes sight and the story is fulfilled for all creation to see and believe. Amen.

EASTER DAY: SUNDAY, APRIL 4

The Easter story in the Gospel of Mark feels a little like an untouched coloring sheet. Here are the outlines of the story: Grieving women. The stone rolled away. A young man explaining that Jesus is risen. The empty tomb. The abruptness of Mark's version reveals the absence of color or longed-for details. The oldest versions of Mark end early, at 16:8, with the women saying nothing because they are afraid.

Easter takes on its technicolor hue, not as the women

hurry away from the tomb, but as the Holy Spirit helps them overcome their fear. Slowly, the women tell what they saw. Softly, pastel hues creep into the picture. The risen Jesus appears first to those who followed him, and then to others. Brighter, bolder shading fills in the page.

Think back to what Jesus promised and to the glory of God all around you. The fullness of the spectrum fills every inch of blank canvas in imaginations and hopeful souls. The truth of resurrection makes

bright what was dim. Easter illuminates the shadows of our fears and doubts.

Loving Creator, God of all things, grant us a new, perceptive joy in resurrection this Easter and every day. Increase our trust in you, so we may boldly live as the people you made and called us to be. Amen. 🌸