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Vocation is a Journey, not a Destination

Katie Kreutter
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Unlike many of my peers, I started at Fisher as a freshman back in 2005 thinking that I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I had a clear goal in mind—video production—and was confident that enrolling in the C / J major would help me achieve it. While the courses, professors, and extracurricular opportunities within the program certainly fueled my passion for this field, with each passing year I became more aware that this might not be the best long-term career choice for me."
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Unlike many of my peers, I started at Fisher as a freshman back in 2005 thinking that I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I had a clear goal in mind—video production—and was confident that enrolling in the C / J major would help me achieve it. While the courses, professors, and extracurricular opportunities within the program certainly fueled my passion for this field, with each passing year I became more aware that this might not be the best long-term career choice for me.

Vocation. It’s a term typically associated with ministry but in actuality the definition is quite general and applicable across disciplines: “A strong impulse or inclination to follow a particular activity or career,” or “A particular occupation, business, or profession; calling” (emphasis my own). Calling is another word that tends to carry religious connotation, yet here it is used in reference to one’s occupation, however that might look for each person. I have heard it said that one’s calling could be characterized by the cross section of one’s greatest strength and one’s greatest passion. At the start of my tenure at Fisher I thought I had a sense of calling. As I approached graduation, however, I realized that sense was driving me towards ministry after all. This determination was not arrived at lightly or quickly. It was not a “lightning bolt from the sky” moment or any particular miraculous occurrence. Rather, it was the culmination of much reflection, interaction with peers and faculty members, involvement with ministry and service opportunities on campus, and more.

After graduation I participated in a year of AmeriCORPS*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program and was placed at a local non-profit mentoring organization with a mental health focus. This experience furthered my sense of call and reaffirmed my belief that social justice, outreach, and community engagement cannot be separated from ministry, and that all can and indeed must be called to ministry in this sense of loving and caring for one another. After completion of this year of service, I accepted a position at the organization and began applying to seminaries. I ultimately decided upon studying locally in order to keep my position as a part-time Community Outreach and Engagement program assistant, which I found very meaningful and enjoyable. Around this same time, I was offered and accepted a Campus Ministry Coordinator position at a local college. I saw this as an opportunity to come full circle since my involvement with campus ministry as a student at Fisher had been so formative to my spiritual development and I wanted to be part of facilitating this experience for others. I also served at a local assisted living facility, interacting with elderly
residents and leading worship services there. I’ve had some of my most rewarding memories to date at this location, gleaning from the spirited wisdom of those whom I encountered with lifetimes of experiences, and I am grateful for the opportunity to keep in touch with some of these individuals.

During this period, I learned much about myself and ministry, mainly that I was a work in progress and that a seminary student graduates with more questions than answers. At first, I found this ambiguity unsettling but came to appreciate it over time. If God, theology, spirituality, and the like could be standardized and rigorously defined I do not believe they would be worth following and exploring. It was out of this lack of clear definition that I pursued a Clinical Pastoral Education experience at Strong Memorial Hospital, in which I am still a participant. This incredible time of learning has enabled me to serve as a chaplain on the pediatric and psychiatric units, as well as hospital wide. The interactions I have with staff and patients are not always overtly spiritual, yet remain incredibly humbling and sacred as I have the gift of being present during the most momentous times of others’ lives, whether they are times of sadness and pain or joy and celebration. I have prayed with families at the bedside of a loved one who has died or is unresponsive and I have watched ill newborns and children grow stronger each day until they are able to go home. I see the Spirit moving on a daily basis in all kinds of circumstances and am honored for this opportunity. Yet I am reminded that the Spirit moves in this way at all times and in all places and all have this same opportunity, regardless of setting, station, or vocation.

Looking forward, I know not what the future holds, and I believe it has taken me this long to be not only accepting of but grateful for this reality. I have learned that vocational pursuit is not exclusive to ministry and not restricted to one particular job or position or life experience. Vocation is a journey, not a destination, and each day is an opportunity for learning, confusion, challenge, messiness, and excitement even in the midst of what might seem mundane. The clichés are true: We only live once. Make the most of every moment. Carpe diem.