

As our Easter season continues, I continue to be mindful of signs of hope. I invite you again to join me in this joyful discipline. What signs of hope meet you each day? How do they transform your outlook on life and our world? What do they say to you about the future? Consider keeping a journal for a few weeks or discussing these signs of hope (and these questions for reflection) with family and friends as you recap the day together.

Each year, around this time, I am fortunate to participate in the selection process of one of the local scholarships given to graduating seniors. It is always a challenge for the committee to select just one applicant, but for the most part, it is a joyful experience. It is always uplifting and inspiring to see the accomplishments of these students, to read their essays, and to learn of their hopes and dreams for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Allow me a moment to say that we are fortunate to have such wonderful teachers and academic opportunities to enrich the lives of our young people. To all of you reading this who are part of our local and neighboring school districts (teacher, administrator, staff, coach, parent, student, volunteer, etc.) thank you for all you do! Each year, we see in our graduating classes living signs of hope – not only for the future, but for our present.

The particular scholarship for which I share oversight as pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran is oriented to medical science or related fields. This year's graduating class has several students planning to pursue careers in nursing, physical therapy, medicine, and other caring professions – seemingly more than in previous years. In many of their essays, I read about their faith and their commitment to serve others. For many of them, they chose this future profession to match their academic and spiritual gifts with the needs of others. In the Church, we call this “vocation.”

The word “vocation” can mean simply one's trade or profession, but is often used (in church and secular society) to reflect one's passion, purpose, or mission. Vocation is one's calling, or “life's work.” In the Lutheran perspective of Christianity to which I belong, vocation is central to a baptismal life.

Martin Luther believed and taught that living as a baptized child of God was a daily experience. Each day is an opportunity to receive and celebrate God's grace and to respond in kind through one's work, play, and relationships. For Luther (and for Lutheran Christians), we are people of faith not only in our experiences of intentional worship, but also (and especially) in our day-to-day living. Our vocations are not merely a means for being productive citizens and receiving wages to support ourselves and our families, but a means also for serving God and our neighbor.

Of course, one can find a faithful vocation in just about any professional field – not only the so-called “caring professions.” It is a matter of identity as a child of God and an intention to match one's skills and spiritual gifts with the needs of others and the needs of God's creation. It is sharing the abundant life one receives in God's grace through the intentional ways one shares their gifts and skills for the sake of others.

I know some of the graduating seniors through my ministry and had the pleasure to spend some time with more of them at the Baccalaureate Service on May 10. These students of faith are being called and led into various vocations that will no doubt make a difference in the lives of many people. They are setting out in hope to be faithful in their calling and are led not only by God's Spirit but by supportive families, teachers, and communities.

This is not only a sign of hope for the future they will bring us as they enter fully into their chosen vocations, but a sign of hope here and now.

We are reminded that our community is doing something right when we see young people equipped to pursue their passion and share their gifts for the sake of others and creation. We are doing something right as communities of faith when we see young people of faith connecting the grace they've received from God to their future vocations. Finally, we are reminded by this hopeful celebration of graduation and future vocation that we all are given certain gifts, skills, and relationships by which we can make God's grace known.

If you haven't already, give some thought and prayer to how your living (professional or otherwise) is a faithful "vocation" – an intentional life that serves God and neighbor, bearing witness to the abundant life of grace God so delights for us to know.