

## from the Preface

In each of the congregations I have served as pastor, it has been my experience that many members have little practical sense of how to connect the faith they profess with the lives they lead. Typically, they have a vague sense that God wants them to live morally upright lives. They hope, of course, that non-believers will do the same. They appreciate God's promise of forgiveness, particularly when they have a sense that they have failed. Trying times drive them to prayer. Otherwise, they find comfort in the knowledge that they are "as good as most and better than some." When it comes to the routines of daily life and work, however, their faith as Christians, expressed eagerly in worship and church-related activities, just doesn't seem to play much of a conscious role. *Listen! God Is Calling!* is an attempt to understand why this is so and to propose a resource from the church's heritage that I have found helpful for bridging the gap that exists between Sunday worship and weekday living among so many of today's church members.

In the first two chapters, I make comments and draw conclusions regarding the tendency to separate faith and daily work, noting how this tendency hinders the church's mission to be a transforming presence in the world. In doing so, I draw on my own observations from almost twenty-five years as a parish pastor and on my reading of sociologists of religion, theologians, and other concerned observers of the church.

Some of these observers have suggested that a renewed emphasis on the traditional Lutheran teaching regarding the vocation of all the baptized can again be a useful tool for helping Christians bridge the gap. Building on this suggestion, chapters three and four offer an overview of the church's understanding of vocation, focusing particularly on Martin Luther's redefinition of the term.

## from Chapter 6

God cares about the world, so much so that God continues to be at work in it. God is at work in and through the lives of people, all people—whether they are aware of it or not, whether they are Christian or not. How exciting it can be for believers to discover this activity of God where they least expect it, in the everyday. How affirming it is for them to realize that they are, in effect, agents of God in the ongoing work of creation and even "means of grace" as they function as the channels through which others experience God's love. How seldom do most congregations proclaim this provocative truth as they find their energies and priorities drawn inward to the various activities that, by necessity or by custom, take place to maintain the institution of the church. How difficult it is for many of the baptized to hear this truth, accustomed as often they are to experiencing their daily work merely as a necessity related primarily to "making a living."

In the previous chapter I suggest that congregations and their leaders must be intentional and consistent in reinforcing the church's teaching on vocation and its application to the daily lives of its members. At least some part of the gathering times of the Christian community should be devoted to acknowledging and celebrating the sacred character of those times when the members of the body of Christ scatter to go about the routine tasks of daily living. This is a challenge, given the deeply rooted tendency of people to confine God and faith to places and actions traditionally perceived as religious.

As the church endeavors to address this challenge, it is important to celebrate the fact that there are members of congregations who do "get it." There are Christians who, hearing the teaching on vocation articulated and affirmed again and again, begin to develop the skills to listen for God's call to them in every aspect of their lives. They know that there is more to life than work—and they know that through their work they have a prime opportunity to express who they are as people created and gifted by God. They know that through their daily labors they provide a service to other people, whether directly or indirectly—and they know that in serving, they also honor God who has called them to do this very thing. They know that everything they do is affected by the fact that they are sinners—and they know that, in Christ, God offers them forgiveness and the possibility of bringing value even from their imperfect actions. All of this gives them a sense of resilience as they approach the routines of daily life and work as well as an attitude of expectation as opposed to the futility that characterizes the outlook of so many people in the workforce today.