

## Everyday Callings: Called to the Way of Love at Life House



I've always felt called to work with young people, but never did I say to myself, "I want to work with homeless and at-risk youth." When I look back now I can see how circumstances and events led me to my work today. I can see our creator's hand in it.

Two of my favorite quotes, which also really exemplify how I feel about my work at Life House, are by Father Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit Priest and founder of Homeboy Industries, one of the best gang intervention programs in the United States.

In his book *Tattoos on the Heart* he states, "Kinship (is) not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not a 'man for others'; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that." He also states, "You stand with the least likely to succeed until success is succeeded by something more valuable: kinship. You stand with the belligerent, the surly, and the badly behaved until bad behavior is recognized for the language it is: the vocabulary of the deeply wounded and of those whose burdens are more than they can bear."

I would say that this type of kinship is one of Life House's biggest strengths, and this kinship with the youth we serve is a significant element in all of our programming: Housing, Wellness, Youth Center, Employment, and Education (my program). People ask me what I do, and I usually tell them that I help first generation youth with the college enrollment process, tutor youth studying for their GEDs, help youth reconnect with high school, connect young parents to ECFE/Preschool/Child Care resources, among other duties. But honesty, the most important thing I do, and that I feel called to do, is simply to love my youth for who they are in each moment, no matter what is going on or what decisions they may have made, recognizing that people are complicated and this world is complicated. Often what people need is for someone to be there with them, not just there for them. From a personal faith perspective, I try to infuse a simple concept into my work, and that is to love unconditionally and to also be kind, compassionate, humble, gentle and patient (Colossians 3:12). Buddha also reiterated this, saying, "Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are things which renew humanity."

People sometimes say to me, "Those youth are lucky to have you." This is very kind and very much appreciated, but it also leaves me feeling kind of sheepish. I truly feel honored to be a part of their lives, and honored that they would share their lives with me and be in kinship with me. I mean, look at me! I am a not-very-cool 40-year-old mom that basically drives a minivan, and to top it off I grew up in in the woods with few neighbors and my hippie parents. I'm also straight and quite white. On the surface we don't have a lot in common. Luckily, compassion and kindness and "being with" are way more powerful than trivial surface level ways to categorize humans, such as age, gender or race.

It is an honor to share in my youths' triumphs, joys, and vulnerabilities. It is an honor to advocate for them. Not to say there are not terribly difficult days, but I feel blessed beyond measure that my work at Life House feels more like a calling than a job.

*Respectfully submitted by Amber Sadowski*

# Everyday Callings: Called To Serve Our Neighbors

Dr. Howard Thurman, a civil rights leader and theologian, suggested that the true work of Christmas begins once we return to our everyday lives. Part of that work is “finding the lost, healing the broken, and feeding the hungry”. In many ways, this quote defines the fine work of CHUM in our community as is reflected at the beginning of each CHUM Assembly when we sing the hymn “We are Called” written by David Haas. Here is the refrain: “We are called to act with justice. We are called to love tenderly. We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.”

I have had the honor of responding to that call by representing our church as a CHUM delegate for several years and by serving on both the CHUM Board and Executive Team. In these roles, I continue to learn more about the needs of many of our Duluth neighbors and to appreciate the many blessings that I sometimes take for granted. And, of course, I have had both the honor and the pleasure of working with many of you as we bake for the Rhubarb Festival, participate in the National Night Out CHUM Community Picnic and collect and distribute school backpacks at the beginning of each school year.

I look forward to doing the work of Christmas with you throughout 2020 as we join other faith communities in our collective calling to support CHUM.

*Respectfully submitted by Jane Jarnis*



## Everyday Callings: A Calling To Serve

I have never considered myself much of a leader. Many times in my life, I have found myself in the awkward situation of trying to explain my point of view in a clear way. This usually includes way too many hand gestures. I can have the most wonderful conversations with a good friend or someone I feel comfortable around; someone who gets me. But when I am engaging with someone new, or a large group of people, I imagine them walking away from our meeting feeling somewhat confused and thinking to themselves, “What just happened?”. And so, when I was asked if I would consider becoming the director of the altar guild, my immediate gut feeling was, “Why on earth would anyone want to have me be the leader of such a distinguished group of faith-filled people! Surely they will dismiss me and any ideas I may have.” I guess that didn’t show much faith on my part of the truly wonderful people I have come to know and love as my fellow altar guild members. But back then in 2013, I would not have considered being an altar guild director my “calling”. It was more like a slightly scary, intimidating step for me to overcome. How could I be worthy of caring for such traditions, not to mention carry around some of the 100+ year-old treasures we use in our worship services, like our irreplaceable chalice adorned with jewels given by the women of St Paul’s, or our baptism bowl which has held the chrism oil that has anointed hundreds! And I think I resisted for a while, not feeling like I was meant for it. But then, something started to change in my heart. I began to feel a sense of calm and peace with this new responsibility in this wonderful place. I let myself feel the calling.

Many of you may be familiar with the movie “Dead Poet’s Society”. It was released in the summer of 1989 just before I became a senior in high school. I was deeply moved by this stirring, coming-of-age drama. A scene that really resonated with me happens early in the movie when actor Robin Williams, playing the role of a poetry teacher to a group of teenage boys at an elite boarding school in 1959, encourages them to look closely at pictures of past students in the school’s trophy case. He urges the boys to lean in and listen to the young men of the past, as if to hear them whispering “Carpe diem.” Now, this was particularly impactful to me for 2 reasons: 1) I knew what “Carpe diem” meant before it was even translated in the movie! I had just spent two years of my high school education taking Latin – my dad was so proud. And so I knew quickly that “Carpe diem” meant “Seize the day.” 2) I absolutely believed that the faces of the boys in those pictures, boys who by now had become old men, were urging this next generation of young men to “Seize the day!” I could practically hear it.

And now, as a member of the altar guild, I get the privilege of entering into all the holy places of our church and sacristy. I often find it easy to “geek out” at the amazingly old pieces of silver, brass, and linens that I can look at closely and hold. I do recognize that the church is more than a beautiful building and the things inside it. It is about the people, and how we are called to love one another. But also for me, when I really take a moment and pay attention, I can hear the voices of those wonderful people of the altar guild that have gone before me. They too held these items in their hands. They are whispering to me “carpe diem.” Seize this day and make it count. Take what you have learned, felt and seen in this place, and go out in the world and spread it around.

Oh yes, this is my calling.

*Respectfully submitted by Carrie Miller*

## My Calling



### Called to the Way of Love

I would like to say that my "calling" after my retirement came in the form of a reassuring message from above telling me what to do next, a message I could embrace without hesitation or doubt. This would be in keeping with the typical meaning of "calling"... "a strong urge toward a particular way of life or career; a vocation". Alas, my experience has been the alternative definition... "the loud cries or shouts of an animal or person, as in 'the calling of a cuckoo'." In my case, calling out "what the heck should I do with the time I have left."

In reality, finding the answer to my calling has seemed rather meandering and quite accidental. There have been themes, however. First, in one way or another, I have always worked with children. Second, wild places and my faith have been my refuges. Third, is the simple lesson taught to me by my grandmother. It went like this, in times

of trouble or doubt she would first look us in the eye and ask us "What is the right thing to do?", quickly followed by a very stern admonition "And we always do the right thing". In retrospect, it makes sense that the answer to my calling was to focus on issues related to the climate emergency. To me, caring for God's creation is clearly the right thing to do for our children. With this in mind, I hope to devote more of my time to working with the Citizen's Climate Lobby (CCL). CCL's primary goal is to help create the political will to enact a carbon fee and dividend system. At this point, I am climbing the steep learning curve of climate science and the creation care perspectives of various faith traditions. In just a few weeks, I have met many wonderful and dedicated people. At some point, I hope to do my part to mobilize faith communities in working toward a healthier climate for our children. I hope you can join me for the ride.

*Respectfully submitted by Charlie Orsak*

## Called to Teach Meditation



### Called to the Way of Love

A year ago a feeling was growing in me that I was receiving so much from my church and returning so little. How to serve became a lingering question. This question led to an inventory of my talents; which led to the realization that I'm good at meditating. So I mentioned the idea to Rev. Barb Elliott that I would be willing to lead a mediation group at St. Paul's if there was interest. She mentioned this idea to the staff at St. Paul's. Shortly after, Director of Christian Formation Sue Van Oss asked if I'd be willing to teach meditation to the youth in faith formation classes. My first reaction was to think, "That's not what I had in mind. I've never taught mediation to children. Can I do that?"

Fortunately, I had been hearing Barb and Bill preach about "callings" and so I wondered, "Is this what I'm being called to do?" Do ordinary people like me receive callings? In Rev. Bill Van Oss's June-July 2019 Messenger writing he assures us that people like me do receive Everyday Callings. So perhaps that's what I experienced in the fall of 2019. Through the encouragement and support of Sue Van Oss, the faith formation guides, and the St. Paul's staff, I was given the opportunity to contribute my little bit of mediation teachings to the Wednesday night faith formation classes. It's been a wonderful experience for me. I've gained more than I've given, I'm sure. I've had so much fun laughing with the children as I learn to teach them meditation. My first challenge was to select the meditations that would be easily adapted to children; and then to infuse those mediations with the Way of Love message consistent with their faith formation curriculum of Love Neighbor, Love Self, and Love God. I found that in order to teach something means that I need to understand it better myself. So I have benefited from understanding the Way of Love more thoroughly. I have also been able to observe how the faith guides have creatively used this Way of Love faith formation curriculum to bring this concept alive in these children. I am so grateful that I was called and supported in this endeavor.

Peace Be With You.

*Visit St. Paul's Duluth YouTube channel to see Marian's meditations!*

Marian Flammang

## Everyday Callings



Called to the  
Way of Love

We have been talking about calling for the past year or so at St. Paul's. Like many others, I thought calling was reserved for people who served in the church, or maybe someone called to be a doctor. I didn't really know how the concept applied to all of us. As I have learned more about it, I am able to identify things in my own life that I consider callings.

My professional career is as an accountant. My first realization about calling is that my work does seem to be the intersection of something I am good at and something others need, perhaps a calling. As I learn more, I realize being an accountant has put me in places and with people where I have been called in another way.

Financial work with small business owners can be intimate. People tend to be very private about their financial situations, so as an accountant I am already in a trusted position. Combine the trust with a couple of key questions about how things are going for them and I have ended up listening to stories about sick parents, challenges with siblings, financial worries, death, divorce, and many other very intimate and sometimes painful things. I give people space and confidentiality that they expect regarding their financial information and they use that to share other things. I am not a trained counselor, so I don't do much more than listen and offer support. But I can't help but feel I am in the right place at the right time to help someone who may not feel comfortable reaching out to anyone else.

Callings happen outside of work, too. I am excited to share a story from last week. I was on a backpacking trip on the Superior Hiking Trail with my good friend, Beth Fait, and it seemed we were called to be on the trail at exactly that time to meet exactly the people we met. The first pair of backpackers we spoke to were a mother and daughter. The mother was thru hiking (doing the whole trail from the Wisconsin border to Canada – approx. 320 miles) and her daughter had joined her for a section. As we spoke with them, we found out that the mother's husband had died just a few weeks earlier from a long struggle with dementia. We asked a few questions and listened to her struggles. As we parted ways to continue our respective journeys, she called us "Trail Angels" and was inspired by Beth's last name (Fait – Fate?). We met another group along the way that had also suffered recent tragic losses. Again, we listened and offered support. Being together in nature without the distractions of everyday life already feels spiritual, but to be able to be there for others in that space was even more. It truly felt like we were called and had experienced (as one of our trail friends described it) "God winks."

Leslie Brunfelt

## Everyday Callings: Simple and Ordinary Call Stories



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In the first part of June, my daughter and I drove across the country to Washington state to attend a wedding. The entire trip was amazing and wonderful, and we saw elements of God's creation that you can only see when you're driving 300 miles a day with your family in a sports utility vehicle packed with sleeping bags and the makings for s'mores. Calling was experienced daily, from conversations with park rangers called to warn tourists about charging bison in Yellowstone to a man we met in Glacier called on a yearly trip to America from Vietnam in order to visit national parks with his wife.

Of these many calling experiences, my favorite is one that my daughter told me about. I feel that the story she shared captures the spirit of calling in our daily lives and points to just one of the benefits of raising a faith-filled and spiritual child.

While we were attending the wedding, Evelyn spent most of her time with a group of six or eight other children jumping on a trampoline. While doing so, the kids began a game of "Truth or Dare," which is basically the game children play that fathers have the most nightmares about. I can't speak to every truth or dare that was proposed, but one dare was for the kids to say every swear that they could think of.

Apparently, they had agreed before hand that each participant could have one "pass" if they were faced with something that they just didn't feel they could do. Evelyn used her pass on this one, and stated "I go to church, and I'm not going to say any swears." She was called to do what she felt was right, and she was called to state that this was done because of the role of God in her life.

Many examples of calling aren't so easily spotted. It isn't every day that we hear someone say "I am acting in this way because of God," or "I will not do this thing because of God." However, God guides our lives every day, and we walk God's path every day, and I think that's what calling is about. I think, too, calling is about celebration of God's forgiveness of us and love for us through our actions. Through speaking to and listening for God in our daily lives, we see so many opportunities to celebrate God's call to love.

With Love, Glenn Maloney