

Limitless Ways to Answer the Call

Kerry Dolan

As humans, we are neurobiologically wired to connect and care for one another. The call to care for others is literally *hard-wired* into our DNA, and it is a call that transcends time and place. Many have answered the call before us, and many will answer the call after us. My own experience of caring for others has taken me to many different places, and, likewise, I have provided care in many different ways.

I spent the summer of 2015, along with other high school students, working for the Ecology Youth Corps cleaning up the side of Interstate-5 – an exceptionally dirty, but rewarding job. In 2016 I traveled to Ghana and spent three weeks of my summer working alongside several local Ghanaian volunteers, helping to build a school in a local town. Additionally, as a high schooler in my church’s youth program, I spent several summers traveling to various locations around the Pacific Northwest participating in one-week service trips with my peers. On these trips, we served meals to houseless populations, killed invasive plant species so that indigenous species could thrive, and erected cattle fences in blistering heat, amongst other things.

I offer these anecdotal examples of care not because I wish to make myself seem righteous or more “deserving” of God’s love. Rather, I provide these examples to demonstrate the importance of working alongside others to promote care – perhaps the most significant aspect of caring for others. I believe that the call to care for others cannot, and should not, be answered by one person alone. As PLU’s Wild Hope Center for Vocation states: “Vocation is being called *with others* to promote human and ecological flourishing” (Wild Hope Center for Vocation, emphasis added).

Covid’s isolating nature proved difficult (arguably an understatement), and for many of us it created a sense of displacement, anxiety, and unpredictability. As we begin transitioning out of the extreme uncertainty and isolation that we faced during the first year and half of the global

pandemic, I find myself reflecting on the ways in which myself and others answered the call to care for others during such challenging times. While I am reminded of all the ways the pandemic so detrimentally affected aspects of my life and the lives of others, I am also reminded of how the pandemic presented us with a once-in-a-generation invitation to reimagine the boundaries and limitations of how we answer the call to care for others.

Attending an institution that so outwardly promotes care, and that encapsulates this attitude in its mission statement – “PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care – for other people, for their communities and for the Earth” (About PLU) – it only makes sense that PLU attracts people who care for others. In October of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd and other egregious racial injustices that continued to transpire, my fellow ultimate frisbee captains and I felt called to brainstorm how we could promote care and social justice while in isolation. We decided to organize a program-wide social justice run/walk. To briefly explain, we chose to donate funds to three organizations that help marginalized communities in different ways. Every dollar we raised was one mile that an ultimate frisbee player had to run or walk in a location convenient for them. We had our participants reach out to anyone and everyone they knew, asking them to donate whatever they could afford, to any of the three organizations we were promoting. As we reached our donation deadline, and after all the calculations were complete, we were absolutely astounded to learn that we had raised over \$1,000 across the three organizations! This completely exceeded our expectations. So, we divvied up the miles among our teammates and had everyone send in a picture of themselves while running or walking their miles.

Not only did the outcome of this fundraiser surpass the expectations held by my fellow captains and me, but it also equipped us with the knowledge that we do not need to adhere to

traditional ways of answering the call to care for others. We had succeeded in organizing a completely virtual event, seeing each other only through our computer screens. This event, which was born, organized, and facilitated within the parameters of the pandemic, was carried out in isolation. Though this made our efforts difficult, it expanded my understanding of how limitless the possibility of answering the call to care for others really is. And, most importantly, it reinforced that though we may have been confined to the isolation of a global pandemic, we answered the call to care for others *together*.

A foundational aspect of Martin Luther's Reformation was based on gaining salvation through faith, not works. However, situated as the seventh element in the Core Elements in Lutheran Higher Education is *Service to the advancement of life, health, and wholeness*. This element emphasizes Martin Luther's teachings on service. While Martin Luther's faith-alone doctrine to salvation seems a bit counterintuitive to the seventh element of service, he believed that people are called to use their, "...God-given freedom responsibly and maturely in service to others in this world" (Service Wholeness and Health: Lutheran Studies). Though Luther was not crafting his controversial teachings in the context of a global pandemic, it is evident that his teachings can still be applied while living through one. We are citizens of the world and therefore citizens to each other, "...subject to all" in the words of Martin Luther.

It is in our human nature to care for others, and it *is* possible to answer the call to care for others in the midst of a global pandemic. This call is one that myself and others have heard and responded to before, during, and now after the pandemic, and as we begin to emerge after two long years of isolation, let us not forget the invaluable lessons the pandemic has taught us. Being able to conceptualize care outside of its traditional framework excites me, and I cannot wait to see where, and with whom, I continue to answer the call to care for others.

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### Works Cited

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