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Bringing Calling Back to Life

A Conversation with Dr. Kathleen Cahalan

AUGUST 3, 2021 BY COLLEGEVILLE INSTITUTE [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)




UNLIKELY CONVERSATIONS

Unlikely Conversations is a podcast from the Collegeville Institute that features unique and dynamic interviews with writers, thinkers, scholars and artists affiliated with our programs. In its second season, each episode of the podcast centered on the subject of writing, faith, and justice with alumni guests from our [writing workshops](#).

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Does the phrase "God's calling" make you tense? If so, you're not alone. Many Christians confuse calling with discovering one secret "right" path in life. When faced with multiple options and decisions, it can be paralyzing.

According to Dr. Kathleen Cahalan, this individualistic view of vocation is often harmful. Instead, she advocates for returning to a more communal understanding of Christian calling where people see their callings first to be communities of faith. In this episode, Kathleen talks about her research and

work to revitalize the language around vocation, equipping both individuals and congregations to experience God's calling in wider and more expansive ways.

We are asking big questions about the theology of Christian calling and vocation during this season of the *Unlikely Conversations* podcast. Join us every other Tuesday for a new episode where host Ellie Roscher speaks with theologians, church leaders, and clergy in the Collegeville Institute's Communities of Calling Initiative about how they practice vocation as a dynamic verb rather than a static noun.

Topics and resources discussed in this episode:

- [Communities of Calling Initiative](#)
- [The Stories We Live: Finding God's Calling All around Us](#) by Kathleen A. Cahalan
- [The Centered Life: Awakened, Called, Set Free, Nurtured](#) by Jack Fortin
- ["Variations on a Theme of Liminality"](#) by Victor Turner

Bios



Kathleen A. Cahalan is Professor of Theology at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary and Senior Research Fellow at the Collegeville Institute. She co-edited two volumes while directing the Collegeville Institute Seminars project: [Calling All Years Good: Vocation throughout Life's Seasons](#) (2017) and [Calling in Today's World: Voices from Eight Faith Perspectives](#) (2016). She has also authored books for a broad church audience, including [Stories We Live: Finding God's Calling All around Us](#) (2017) and [Living Your Discipleship: Seven Ways to Express Your Deepest Calling](#), co-authored with Laura Kelly Fanucci (2015). In addition, Dr. Cahalan directs the coordination of the Lilly Endowment's [Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative](#), begun in 2018.



Ellie Roscher is a writer, theology teacher, and host of the *Unlikely Conversations* podcast. She is a board member at the Collegeville Institute and the author of *12 Tiny Things*, *Play Like a Girl*, and *How Coffee Saved My Life*. Ellie holds an MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College and an MA in Theology from Luther Seminary. She lives in Minneapolis with her spouse and sons. Follow Ellie on social media at @ellieroscher [[Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#)].

Matthew Ian Fleming edited the audio for this podcast. You can find Matthew on Instagram at [@matthewianfleming](#) and his other podcasts at www.alterguild.org.

Discussion questions

- How do you understand the term "vocation"? Does that language resonate with you?
- What gives your life meaning and purpose?
- In what ways do you experience God's calling today?
- How is God calling your faith community?

Next Steps

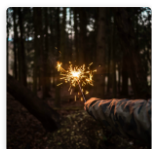
- Check out materials created to introduce congregations to the language of calling and movements of discernment on the [Communities of Calling Initiative website](#).
- Scroll through [The Threads of Vocation: A Comic](#) by Samantha Klassen to learn more about the theology of vocation that guides the work of the Collegeville Institute. Samantha created this comic for saint benedict's table in Winnipeg, MB, a CCI partner congregation.
- Watch a video or two from the Collegeville Institute's [Lives Explored](#) series, which showcases everyday examples of how people think about God and faith in relation to their life and work. For instance, [Angela's story](#) explores the struggle many parents face as they navigate their call to

parent and their call to work. [Jane's story](#) highlights the importance of trusting God in matters of discernment.

- Read up on Martin Luther's theology of vocation. The team from [Saint Mark's Lutheran Church](#) in Spokane, WA, a [CCI partner congregation](#), recommends D. Michael Bennethum's book, [Listen! God Is Calling! Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work](#).
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The Grammar of Our Callings



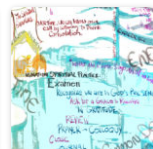
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