

Called to more than a job

By [Jane Messah](#)

August 21, 2012

Frederick Buechner defines “vocation” as the place where one’s “greatest passion meets the world’s greatest need.” I first heard this when Buechner gave a chapel sermon at the Christian liberal arts college I attended. To us students eager to make our mark on the world, such statements seemed to emphasize the occupation itself as the means through which we would be called to serve God.

After graduate school, I remained intent on finding a job that not only matched my interests and contributed to society, but also seemed appropriate for my background and skills. For more than a year, I searched job postings, composed cover letters and conducted informational interviews—while juggling internships, a part-time job and freelance writing assignments. With as many as 22 million people unemployed or looking for full-time work, I had growing doubts that I would receive any response to my job applications—much less land a job that combined my passion *and* an identifiable larger need.

In the midst of this discouraging job search, I attended a workshop on vocation at this year’s [Ekklesia Project](#) gathering. Workshop leaders Tim Otto and Colin Chan Redemer offered two main points:

- Our jobs often prevent us from engaging with the church.
- Our identity is often shaped by our occupation instead of by the church.

Otto is a part-time nurse and a pastor-teacher at an intentional community; by earning just what he needs and living in community, he believes he is able to give better care to his patients. Redemer’s wife is a waitress who stays an hour after her night shift so she can give a ride home to her colleagues who work in the kitchen—colleagues who were often robbed when they walked home. Both of them have recognized that their primary calling is not a job. It’s the task of finding their place in the body of Christ.

Hearing this made me question whether seeking my vocation prevents me from seeing where my interests can be used to meet the everyday needs of those around me. In fact, while my part-time schedule has meant less of a stable income for our family, it has also freed up time for me to cook meals to share with others—the family of a newborn baby, a group of homeless people staying overnight at our church.

This vocational paradigm requires some flexibility. People's resources vary, and so do the choices available to them. Yet such vocational considerations may lead us to rethink our own situations—and the choices that shape who we are and how we relate to one another as we try to live out our calling.