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Virtue, Value, and Vocation: Finding Meaning in Medicine

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VIRTUE, VALUE, AND VOCATION: FINDING MEANING IN MEDICINE

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

Megan Linders

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I. Introduction

Imagine you are a physician working at a children's hospital in the emergency department. A young family with a baby named Annie comes in frantic, as their baby has gone into respiratory failure and is having intense difficulty breathing on her own. The young parents beg you to do something to save their child. You can see that baby Annie also has some form of severe neurological impairment. This means the baby has, "profound developmental delays, [requires] around-the-clock care and support, [will be] completely dependent on a wheelchair and [has] no, or very limited, possibilities for communication" (Van Gestel, et. al, 2010). You must decide whether to put her on mechanical ventilation and continue treatment in the ICU in hopes of extending her life, or determine if treatment would be "medically inappropriate" as survival rates in such a situation are incredibly low. Recent scientific research has shown that survival rates are improving though with mechanical ventilation and ICU treatment (Van Gestel, et. al, 2010). You know, however, that even if your patient did survive, she would live a life in and out of the ICU, would not be able to communicate or move freely, and would most likely have a very shortened life-span. So how do you make your decision? The way in which you approach your practice of medicine and what needs you believe you are called to address in the world may be a good place to begin.

As someone who has aspired to be a physician since the age of six, I think it is incredibly important to discern what the meaning of the practice of medicine is. Every

person in the field of medicine and who aspires to practice in this field in the future will have a different answer, though there are most likely some common threads. I believe this meaning is isolated in the discovery of one's self and where one feels called to serve the world. One's self and where one feels called to serve are dependent upon one's experiences, beliefs, talents, gifts, and passions. From all of these facets of our lives, we each define meaning for ourselves, and this meaning then drives the course of our lives and how we live them out.

My own life has been largely influenced by my desire to become a physician, my Christian faith, and my Jesuit education at Regis. The first "big question" I felt strongly confronted by at Regis, the question that drives this entire Jesuit form of education, and the question I will now continue to ask long after graduation is that of "How ought we to live?" This question becomes central to a Jesuit university student's life. It begins in the classroom, and over four years extends into his or her personal life. This question becomes an integral part of not only one's education at Regis, but of a Regis student's entire life. In that integration, this question began to seep into my aspirations for the future. This question began to mold these aspirations, provoked me to question why I was seeking to become a physician, and forced me to realize a deeper meaning behind it all.

The question of "How ought we to live?" became the question of "How ought a physician to live?" Though I was studying for a degree in biology within the pre-medical track, I also found myself studying the deeper meanings in life and how these direct and guide our futures. The Jesuit influence helped me reexamine my reasons for wanting to

become a physician and completely transformed my approach to the meaning of the practice of medicine. I have come to understand the desire to be a doctor as a higher calling, or vocation, for my life.

Through the education I have received at Regis, I have come to understand the practice of medicine as a higher calling and not just another job or career to make money. This idea of vocation implies a more profound meaning. What exactly is that meaning though and how do we begin to understand it? I believe it begins with the realization that each of us is an individual with unique abilities and desires. These are gifted to and created in each one of us specifically because we are each called to do something special with our lives. Once each person recognizes this, he or she must also recognize that this calling is not simply about him or herself. These vocations are designed not only to allow each one of us to fulfill our individual selves, but to also address the needs of the world.

In this understanding, vocation takes on a higher purpose. When we realize we are not only called to serve ourselves, but also called to serve the world in one of its great needs, we find ourselves called to an action filled with meaning. To give completely and freely of oneself is the greatest gift any human person can bestow. When we answer our calling in such a way that serves others, we begin to actualize that gift. So then, not only do we find purpose in our lives on a personal level, but we begin to, “[redeem]...our speck of the world,” (Dillard 201) in addressing the hungers of this world and its people.

The job or career of a physician innately requires at least some concern for others. Even if the physician does not fully realize this, he or she serves others each day through

providing treatment. The extent and quality of the care though are dependent upon how the physician approaches his or her daily work. If the physician sees his or her work as simply a means to an end that provides wealth, comfortable living, and prestige, then the physician's care of his or her patients will stop with treatment. However, if the physician approaches his or her work as a vocation, he or she will recognize a higher calling and will strive to not only treat patients, but also to heal patients as whole persons. This transforms the care the physician provides from just science and technology to care for the whole person with physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, cultural, religious, and family needs. The physician will begin to comprehend the entire picture and will begin to strive to address all the needs of the patient, not just the physical needs. In this more profound approach, medicine is transformed from a career to a vocation.

How does this all begin though? It must start with the recognition of one's true self. What is it one is truly passionate about and how do his gifts and talents fit in? Once one has begun to understand his true self, he may begin discerning to what he is called, and to whom he is called. This in turn leads to a specific vocation where one finds meaning and value based on how his actual self is realized, and how he addresses the needs of the world in this.

So, we will begin to explore these questions more in depth from the perspective of an aspiring physician who's true self has been shaped and discovered through a Christian faith and a Jesuit education. I will start with the definition of vocation—what it means and how one discovers it in his or her own life. This definition will show how important one's true self is in the discernment process. I will then begin a more in-depth look at

some of the founding Christian virtues and Jesuit values within my own life and how they are applicable in my approach to vocation and more specifically, the vocation of a physician. Throughout, I will explore how these can help the physician to practice medicine as a vocation in light of the case introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In conclusion, I will discuss where all this has led my thinking, how it is applicable to the medical world at large, and provide an example of all this in how one who recognizes a deeper meaning in the call of medicine may address the medical case previously described.

II: Defining Vocation

We begin then with the definition of vocation. Here we will examine what vocation is, the distinction between vocation and a career, and how one begins to discern his or her vocation. Let us begin by tackling the problem of how we define vocation. There is a wide variety of views and perspectives which surround the term “vocation”. Some of these are secular while others stem from a religious context. Then, within both the secular context and the religious, there are various definitions and meanings which can be assigned to the idea of “vocation”. Certain perspectives will conjure alternative word choices thinking they are synonymous with “vocation”. The labels range from “work” and “career” to “calling” and “purpose”. So how then does one define vocation? Is it work or a career path or is it something more profound and meaningful? Perhaps the best way to discover what vocation is is to sort through these various perspectives and examine each one thoroughly.

Perhaps the most commonly held view of what vocation means is the work or career each person chooses. Unfortunately, there are often negative connotations associated with these terms. Many generally believe work and career are simply the things we do to make money to live and support a family. Work can be construed as a mindless, grueling labor man puts forth every day to pay the mortgage and put food on the table. Particularly within American culture, work is looked upon as something unpleasant and dissatisfying. Even when one turns to the Bible for a definition of work,

one of the first passages found presents less than pleasant images. In Genesis 3:17, God speaks to Adam after the introduction of original sin into the world and states, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” Thus, even in the beginning of man’s time, work became the “painful toil” through which sustenance was derived. If vocation is simply work, then it could be construed as some painful toil which must be endured in order that each person can survive.

Dorothy Sayers, an English writer and Christian humanist, formulates her definition of vocation through the act of one’s work. Her definition remains within the realm of work, but takes a far more positive approach. In two of her essays (written during and right after World War II), Sayers argues that work is something beneficial to man, but man has lost sight of the good in it. She argues that many take on work because they feel it is a necessary obligation, not because it is something they enjoy and were created to do (Sayers 408). Sayers provides the example of an artist to contrast the widely held negative ideas of work. She poses the idea that the artist turns his passion into his work whereas many people work so in their free time they may enjoy their passions which are not their work. She states, “The worker works to make money, so that he may enjoy those things in life which are not his work and which his work can purchase for him; but the artist makes money by his work in order that he may go on working” (Sayers 408). Unlike most, the artist chooses to make his passion his work and thus enjoys what he does. He does not choose any job so as to make the necessary money to sustain life, and only after time has been spent on this go enjoy his true

passions when he is not working. Instead, the artist transforms his passion into his work and it becomes something more than just a job with a paycheck.

There is no doubt that work must be done to provide for and sustain life, but does it always have to be something miserable? What is it that determines whether or not one enjoys his work? Perhaps the distinction lies with each individual's passions, beliefs, gifts, and talents. The artist from Sayers' example utilizes his passion to make a living. Thus he enjoys his work and in that enjoyment, it becomes something more than just a means to an end. When describing this approach to work, Sayers suggests, "work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do" (Sayers 53). If work becomes something each person lives to do, rather than a toil one does in order to pay the bills and keep food on the table, it takes on a new meaning. It gives each individual a sense of purpose for this life. Maybe then, our purpose in life, which is dependent upon our unique gifts, is the difference between a job we do as a means to an end and a job we engage in as our vocation.

If vocation is dependent upon our unique gifts, talents, beliefs, and passions, we must first decipher those so as to determine which vocation to pursue. Each person has a specific purpose or meaning for this life. This is determined by who each person is as an individual. In order to discover our unique gifts and determine our purpose, it is necessary to first discover what Thomas Merton calls one's "true self." Merton makes the claim that there are many ways to exist within humanity. He argues that so often we live a life which does not reflect our "true self." We wear masks which appease our parents, teachers, society, etc., and in so doing we remain untrue to our innermost selves (Merton

30). He states, “If I never become what I am meant to be, but always remain what I am not, I shall spend eternity contradicting myself by being at once something and nothing, a life that wants to live and is dead, a death that wants to be dead and cannot quite achieve its own death because it still has to exist” (Merton 33). Thus, to decipher what our real individual purpose is here in this world, we must first discover who we are when we do not put up fronts or cater to others’ desires. This is no small task though. After all, how does one begin to determine which parts of his life are his “true self” versus those parts of his life which are the facades? The answer is no easy one, but it begins with our actions and our heart-felt desires which reflect our unique individual qualities.

Parker Palmer also addresses this issue. Where Merton speaks of one’s “true self” though, Palmer speaks of “becoming oneself.” He says in order to discover one’s vocation, each person must first realize who it is he or she was born to be. In order to illustrate what he means by the person each of us was born to be, Palmer uses the example of his granddaughter. He says, “She did not show up as raw material to be shaped into whatever image the world might want her to take. She arrived with her own gifted form, with the shape of her own sacred soul” (Palmer 11). Thus Palmer advocates for the idea that each of us is born in a unique shape and form. However, he also argues that as we grow up we are influenced by the world around us to the extent that we often forget these original forms. We are taught to act and think in certain ways. We are told by parents, teachers, society, etc., that we must do certain things, live in a certain way, and develop into what others think is right for us.

Unfortunately, these influences do not lead us to our true callings and vocations. When we forget who we are and who we are meant to be, it becomes almost impossible to discern what our meanings and purposes are for this life. In order to discover our vocations, we must know who we truly are. Palmer states, “Vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God” (Palmer 10). Thus, if vocation stems from an inner calling, it is necessary to know our true selves. There is no way to discern what the voice inside says if we do not know what lies on the inside in the first place. We must ask ourselves, “Who am I? What is my nature” (Palmer 15). So, in order to discover one’s vocation, one must first begin a dialogue with one’s self. The question then is how does one go about doing this?

The quest to discover one’s true self is not a simple or short one. It is indeed a life-long journey. However, there are particular events which occur in our lives which make us more aware of who we were originally formed to be and what our nature is. These can be happy moments, but more often than not, it is in the trying realities of our life’s journey that we are really able to see our true selves. In Palmer’s book, he discusses one of his life’s most difficult times and the way it helped him reach a point of inner identification. He calls this the “journey into darkness.” He describes this as a type of pilgrimage in which one must travel through unknown spaces. He says, “Treacherous terrain, bad weather, taking a fall, getting lost—challenges of that sort, largely beyond our control, can strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge and make

space for the true self to emerge” (Palmer 18). If the ego is the culmination and manifestation of outside influences which have caused us to suppress our inner selves, then it must be subdued in some way. Only when this happens can we truly discover what lies underneath all the facades which have masked our most natural forms. It is only when we recognize these that we discover ourselves, and in understanding ourselves, we are able to hear the inner voice. This inner voice is what leads us to the individual calling of vocation we have each been designed for.

A part of this journey into darkness which allows us to discover our true selves is what Palmer calls “way closing.” What he means here is akin to the metaphor of one door closing and another opening. These are the events in our lives in which we do not receive what we want or expect. Sometimes we think with our credentials or simply because we are the way we are, we should receive certain opportunities. Palmer discusses how this does not always happen, and often when it does not happen we find ourselves upset and saddened by the loss of an opportunity. When we do not have things we wish to happen occur in our lives, so often we sink into despair, but Palmer provides great insight when he says, “there is as much guidance in what does not and cannot happen in my life as there is in what can and does—maybe more” (Palmer 39). We discover what we are supposed to do with our lives when we discover what it is we are not supposed to do. At some point in life, many people often feel they are meant to be something different from what they eventually become. If the original plan or “way” does not work out though, it is often because somewhere along the way we forgot to find

or acknowledge our true self, and ended up working towards something that was not our true calling (Palmer 40).

These experiences can shape us drastically in what we see as our callings, but only if we are willing to think about them in the process of discernment. Dean Brackely describes the rules set forth by St. Ignatius of Loyola for the process of discernment, and he states these are, “criteria for understanding and responding to emotional states... which [Ignatius] calls ‘consolation’ and ‘desolation’”(Brackley 45). We must examine the ways in which each experience we have effects our lives. The “desolations” or “consolations” Ignatius describes are more than simply pain or happiness. They are, “stirrings and moods, states and affective currents which affect us globally and endow ordinary emotions with a distinctive tone” (Brackley 46). When the experiences in our lives lead us away from something and leave us stagnant (desolation) or when they pull us towards something and energize us (consolation), we should understand these as sorts of guides which help us to understand what we are called to in this life. In this way, we are able to sort through our passions and those beliefs or values which are most important to us, and then utilize those in understanding what purpose we are to serve with our life.

Through discernment, or deeply thinking about the experiences we have and the emotional, psychological, and spiritual states they leave us in, we begin to see more clearly what it is we are uniquely and truly passionate about in life. Brackley states, “our one great love works itself out as passionate loves of people, projects, and all creation” (12). In discovering what we deeply love, we also learn about the areas or people we are called to. We discover something about true selves, and in so doing, are more clearly

able to understand our purpose. A Maryknoll sister named Ita Ford wrote to her niece and said, “I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for—maybe even worth dying for—something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can’t tell you what it might be. That’s for you to find, to choose, to love” (Brackley 58). Shortly thereafter, Ita, who had been living in El Salvador to work with refugees during the civil war, was brutally killed for her work. This I think provides one of the most poignant definitions of vocation. To find something which you love so much you are willing to serve and give your whole life to it because it is what gives your life its purpose. In order to do this though, we must discern our consolations and desolations in life so as to discover our true selves, our great loves, and what it is that fills our life with meaning.

So, it is through discovering our inner selves and understanding what we are not supposed to be through discernment that helps us to determine what it is we are called to. When each of us finds our true self and our true passion, we are better able to see which direction we should venture and which opportunity best utilizes the unique natural form we each possess. Then, once this has been realized, we can begin to pursue different paths which will lead us to our vocation. Sometimes we get things right and sometimes we do not. Often though, when we do not respond to our true vocation, we find that way will close, and that will guide us to where we are called.

Vocation then must be integrated with finding our true and natural form. Once this is discovered, it makes it easier to live a life which responds to our calling. We are able to find our vocation and allow our life to be lived for this vocation. Sayers states,

“work is not primarily a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do” (Sayers 53). When we find our calling we can utilize it in our professions. In this, our work, job, career, becomes not a task, but rather the vocation we are meant to do. In doing what we are meant to do, we fulfill our purpose. Like the artist who lives his passion, we no longer find work something which must be done begrudgingly. Instead we find it something we wish to do. Our work becomes something we enjoy doing, something which gives meaning to our lives and makes us profoundly happy.

In the case of the physician, one must begin (as with any other vocation) by discovering one’s true self. One who is truly called to become a physician will find his or her true self as someone who possesses the qualities to not only do well as a physician, but also to thoroughly enjoy the practice of medicine. It is necessary then that those who feel as though their vocation is that of a physician have a true self that corresponds to this. What I mean here is that one’s gifts, talents, and passions must align with the ability to practice medicine. One must be able to think critically and logically, have a strong understanding of science, medicine, and human physiology and anatomy, be able to take initiative in the diagnosis process, and be incredibly passionate about medicine, just to name a few of the criteria. Thus, one’s true self will include talents and gifts specific to becoming a great physician and a deep passion for medicine and the people it serves. This then brings us to the second aspect of vocation—that aspect which directs the true self to serve a need in the world.

While vocation is wonderful to satisfy one’s own calling and purpose, there is also a grander element to it. Vocation, while it is the individual calling of each person,

also holds a very communal aspect. As humans we are a communal species, and everything we do in life involves others in some way or another. So too does our vocation involve those in the world around us. It usually requires other people to help us understand our vocation. These people in our lives guide us to our vocation through words of wisdom, pivotal encounters which force us to reexamine our lives, and sometimes by knowing us well enough to advocate for the true selves we have not discovered. Whether family, friends, mentors, or even strangers, others in the world around us have a tremendous impact on the discernment of our vocation. Unless we interact with others, we are unable to discover our true callings.

In addition, once others have helped us to discover our calling, it also takes others to help us fulfill this calling. Once we have come to understand our vocation, Palmer states, "...we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service" (Palmer 16). Vocation is about more than one's self. The calling within that asks us to live our vocation is created by our Creator. He has designed us that we may live for more than just ourselves...that we may live in service of our neighbor. So, we are called to live for more than ourselves. For this reason, our vocation is also about service to the world. Unless we are serving others in some form or another, purpose in life is greatly diminished, and so too then is our vocation.

The understanding that our vocation is about more than addressing our desires then leads to another inward quest and examination. Once we have begun a dialogue to understand our inner selves, we must begin to ask where that inner self fits into the world.

Palmer discussed the question of “Who am I?” when first discerning vocation. He then argues that after we have begun to answer that question it, “...leads inevitably to the equally important question ‘Whose am I?’—for there is no selfhood outside of relationship” (Palmer 17). Unless we determine how our unique form fits into the world, identity cannot be complete. While we each possess an individuality, which must be understood to discern our vocation, we must also understand how this individuality fits into the world community. This then leads to Palmer’s question of “whose am I?” When we ask this, we really ask “where am I called to serve?” and “how am I called to serve?” These give a grander meaning to vocation in that it no longer is something which is solely about us. Rather, vocation becomes a type of service of self to the human community.

Vocation then is not only about oneself, but also about the world in which we live. Frederick Buechner, a writer and theologian, addresses this definition of vocation when he claims, “The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work that you need most to do and that the world most needs to have done” (Buechner). When we begin to recognize who we are, we find meaning and purpose. In turn, an understanding of what we see as meaningful leads us to do those things which most propagate and satisfy our purpose, and in so doing, provides each one of us with a genuine happiness. When we feel fulfilled and satisfied in what we are doing, it brings a type of joy which is sustaining to our entire life and being. However, we must go beyond ourselves to really fulfill that purpose. This is why it is so important to live in service of others. Through our vocation, we not only address the needs of our individual callings, but we complete those callings through the extension and giving of ourselves to the world around us. Thus

vocation becomes two-fold. It is about finding our calling and living that calling out by addressing a great hunger in the world.

How do we discover such a need in the world though? There are huge voids found within humanity—hunger, oppression, and the list continues. So which one does our individual vocation address? And how do we each determine this? The starting place is within our own gifts and identity. If we know what we are good at, we are able to direct these talents towards the service of others. For the physician, this can be seen in a compassionate manner aiding the sick and dying or the ability to think critically in high pressured environments to serve patients in the emergency department. Through the utilization of our unique gifts, we are most able to serve the world.

We must also take into consideration that which we deeply care about. Each person, as part of the individual he or she is, has at least one thing in life which he or she is passionate about. Some care deeply about social justice, while others find their passion in science or philosophy. In pursuing what we are passionate about, we will be best able to not only answer our calling, but also to serve others through it. When we are passionate about something, it makes us want to work harder and do the best job possible. Thus, if we integrate our passions into our service of others we will want to be exceptional in what it is we are doing. This will drive us to make a large difference in the world.

Another way of discerning our calling to serve the world is through Palmer's question of "whose am I?" When we ask ourselves this question we begin to think about the obligations we have in our lives. As humans who live in a communal society, we

each have specific obligations. Some of these are to our family members, to our patients or clients, to humanity in general, and to God. As a Christian and for others who are religious I find the last of these to be of utmost importance. When we determine that we must serve God above all else, other things seem to fall into place. The greatest commandment is to “love God with all your heart, soul, and mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22: 36-40). While it is extremely important to love our neighbor, we cannot fully do so unless we love God first. God provides the perfect model of how to love and thus how to serve. If we come to understand this, then we are best able to love and serve our neighbor. Of course, this does not mean those who are not religious cannot also love their neighbor. It simply means they will do so with a different understanding of why and how, which will stem from their beliefs, values, and true self.

So then, vocation becomes something which is not simply about us. It becomes something much greater. It is something which extends beyond our individual selves. Sure, it is important to begin to recognize one’s most natural, true self before extending our vocation, but that is just the beginning. In order to fully realize the potential of our vocation we must also see where this true self fits in the world, how it could be used best to serve a great need in the world, and the purpose for which this true self was created. This however is a life-long journey and dialogue. As we progress through our lives, different experiences reveal more about who we are and what we find important. Each time we learn more about who we are in the dialogue between ourselves and the world, we also begin to see more clearly where, how, and who we are called to serve through our vocation.

As a Christian, I find my true self strongly tied and centered in my faith. Thus, I will focus on the approach to vocation through this lens specifically. Ultimately, for Christians it is God who calls and the true self which answers it. In this creation, our vocation becomes more than work. Yes, our career path should demonstrate our vocation. After all, this is a large part of each individual's life, but we must remember that it is not necessarily all of an individual's life. Vocation does not stop when someone clocks out and goes home. In our lives, vocation extends to our whole being—the being God created us to be. So, we find vocation in our work, our families, our friendships, the ways we worship, the ways we serve others, and in all that we do. In living our lives according to our true selves, we “let [our] life speak” as Palmer says, to our vocation.

Even if one is not Christian though, vocation can be realized in what one finds as meaningful. If serving others or always living justly is important to someone, then this can be the calling they hear. This too extends beyond what one chooses to do for work. If someone is committed to living in service of others or to promoting justice in the world, then this vocation should be lived out in all one does. This should be reflected in the relationships one has, the ways in which one carries him or herself, and the way one makes choices on a day to day basis. In ensuring that one answers his or her individual call every day in all that he or she does, a person lets his or her entire life show what it is he or she is called to do and be.

As someone whose true self is deeply rooted in the teachings and faith of Christianity, I have approached the idea and discernment of my vocation through my faith and education at a Jesuit school. I have aspired to be a doctor from a very young

age due to my passion for medicine and my abilities to practice science, compassion, and leadership, among other things, well. These have all lead me to know more fully my true self, which has directed me towards the vocation of medicine. In my time at Regis, I have been largely influenced by Jesuit education. This has taught me to reexamine why it is I want to practice medicine. It has led me to realize that my gifts and passions fit into the world to address a need in healthcare. This education has led me to an understanding of being created for and called to this profession to serve the world to the best of my abilities, and it has made me realize that this is a vocation which is not about serving myself. The Jesuit education I have received has helped me to understand that the practice of medicine is a vocation which calls one to serve others in the world who are sick, broken, and dying.

In order to discover one's true calling, one must first begin by recognizing and beginning to understand one's true self. For me and for many I know regardless of their faith or religious beliefs, the Christian virtues and Jesuit values have helped immensely. Through the virtues, I started to engage in a dialogue with my character and through Jesuit values, I have been able to understand more fully what is important and meaningful to my true self. For these reasons, we will continue this exploration into the Christian virtues and Jesuit values.

III: Christian Virtues: Charity and Justice

Vocation encompasses finding one's true self, discovering one's talents and great love, and pursuing meaning. How though do we go about discovering these? The virtues are a good starting place as these are traits of character or habits as we will see in following definitions. The virtues give one a road to follow, and provide a guide to finding meaning. The virtues allow us to begin the dialogue and discernment process. So I will begin with a deeper look into what exactly is meant by "virtue." Then I will discuss how these help us find our true selves, focusing specifically on the Christian virtues which have helped me to discover mine. I will then explore the two Christian virtues I find to be most pertinent to my true self and the vocation of a physician.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with Aristotle. Aristotle argued for the pursuit of the good life through virtues. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he states, "Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good" (Aristotle 3). This good is ultimately what we all wish to pursue. In a sense, this good is the vocation we are called to. It is what allows us to fulfill our *telos* or ultimate purpose. Perhaps then our vocation is the path which allows us to best fulfill this *telos*. How do we pursue it though? Aristotle argues that we must live guided by the virtues—finding our true selves through a sort of discernment or dialogue that occurs with the character traits, habits, or dispositions we have.

The virtues can provide one with a deeper meaning and sense of life. This deeper meaning and sense of life then allows us to seek our vocation—that calling or path which leads to our *telos*. Meaning and purpose give one something to aspire to, something which provides a more profound understanding of how one ought to live.

The actions one takes in his life should reflect the ways in which he is called to live. Virtue then must be a type of action or a guide for actions. In fact, William Mattison, a professor of theology at The Catholic University of America, defines virtue as, “a habit that inclines one to act in a good manner” (Mattison 61). Habits are not simply actions though. Habits are those actions we continually repeat in our lives. These in turn shape us as we are constantly doing them and become known for them. Aristotle states, “...our moral dispositions are formed as a result of the corresponding activities. Hence it is incumbent on us to control the character of our activities, since on the quality of these depends the quality of our dispositions” (Aristotle 75). Thus, the actions we repeat in our lives, our habits, shape and determine our character. Virtue then, shapes a character towards the good. Which virtues we each see as important in our lives so as to shape our character will depend on our true selves. Each of us values different things based upon who we are and the virtues we choose as important in our lives are no exception. In understanding which virtues we see as important, we begin to learn something about ourselves.

In my own life, I hold my Christian faith to be especially important. Thus, it has shaped me and allowed me to gain an understanding of my true self in seeing what it is I value as important. Thus, I will now explore the virtues as defined within Christian

teaching. The Church separates the virtues into two categories—the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues. William Mattison, in his book *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues*, gives a brief definition of the distinction between the two types of virtue. He states that theological virtues are distinguished from cardinal virtues in that, “their activities, or objects all concern God directly,” whereas the cardinal virtues, “concern inner worldly activities” (Mattison 66). The cardinal virtues are the virtues focused on when discussing how to live a virtuous life in a more secular context, or in the life we live on Earth. These virtues guide and direct everyday interactions people have with other people, the world around them, and the ways they live out their daily lives. These virtues can help us to discover what is important for our true selves in regard to this earthly life. The theological virtues on the other hand guide the interactions humans have with God and in turn, the ways in which our lives are to be lived out in accordance to this relationship. These virtues provide better understanding of spiritual life and its profound meanings. They also help us to understand why and how we should live if we wish to pursue a good relationship with God. The theological virtues help us determine what we hold to be of importance for our true selves in regard to our spiritual life.

First, let us address the cardinal virtues, the virtues dealing with everyday life and interactions with others and the world around us. The cardinal virtues are justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude (Mattison 66). These virtues direct and guide worldly actions. How we act in everyday situations and how we act in relation to others are the primary focus of the cardinal virtues. Thus, these are virtues which are

foundational in shaping our characters towards becoming what we feel we are called to be. The name itself implies this as, “the very term ‘cardinal’ comes from the Latin ‘hinge’ since a good life is said to hinge upon these virtues”(Mattison 68). These virtues then are central to the understanding of what we each define as a “good life”. The cardinal virtues help one begin to understand how to start living such a life by helping one understand his or her true self. We discover our true self through the virtues. These are the guides to pursue the purpose or good through our own actions in our individual lives.

To understand how these virtues guide and direct our actions in this world, one should know how each of these four virtues is defined. The first of these virtues is justice. Justice is “the virtue that inclines us to good interactions and relationships with others” (Mattison 67). This virtue guides our interactions with others in the world around us. Justice ensures that each and every person is given what is their “due” or what it is they should be ensured simply as a result of their human dignity. Ensuring this means we act well towards others and we do not prevent them from living a good life.

Prudence is defined as, “the virtue of choosing well, or doing practical decision-making well” (Mattison 67). This virtue then allows us to see the world as it truly is and to make wise choices based upon this. Prudence can be seen as an essential part of discernment in which we are called to think critically about the world and choices that face us.

Temperance is defined by Mattison as, “the virtue of well-ordered desires for pleasures” (Mattison 67). Temperance allows us to understand what is excessive and

what is inadequate as far as pleasure is concerned. This includes any type of pleasure, whether it is having fun and not working, indulging in rich foods, purchasing material goods, or engaging in sensual pleasures. The virtue of temperance teaches us where the middle ground is between enjoying pleasures of this world and abusing them.

Fortitude is often thought of as courage, but Mattison defines it as, “the cardinal virtue that enables us to face difficulty well” (Mattison 67). Indeed then, this virtue can be thought of as courage, though that may produce a more extreme image such as that of a soldier. Fortitude in fact can be utilized in any difficult situation, whether that is on the battlefield or at home with family and friends. This virtue allows us to endure the challenges in our lives and keep going. In this world, the virtue of fortitude allows us to deal well with any and all types of human suffering, whether that is our own suffering, that of a loved one or people we do not know in places we have never been.

These four cardinal virtues then provide the basis for the pursuit of the good life. Which virtues one chooses to integrate will allow one to discover more about his or her true self, as the habits or character traits we develop help reveal something in our nature. In having an understanding of the virtues, where and when they play out in our lives, and why we choose to keep them in our lives we can learn a great deal about our inner self and where this directs ones vocation. An examination of our habits shed light on both our most natural form and the influences that surround us. The knowledge we gain from this insight allows us to explore our true self more by reengaging us in a dialogue or discernment between who we are and who we are called to be. This can help us decipher what we find meaningful and why we find it meaningful. In turn the meaning we

discover allows us to discern more thoroughly our true self versus outside influences, and where the former leads us in regard to our vocation. The virtues explained above relate specifically to our beliefs about the world and how we relate to it. So let us now explore the virtues which help us to understand our “bigger picture” beliefs or beliefs about what lies beyond the tangible world.

The other category of virtue is that of theological virtue. There are three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love. Some may believe because these virtues deal specifically with the interactions we have with God, that they do not necessarily pertain to everyone; however, this is untrue. Regardless of the beliefs one has pertaining to God, the theological virtues are the virtues which give spiritual or non-physical value to life. They pertain to the “big picture” beliefs each person holds about life. These virtues help guide us in what we believe lies beyond material and the physical world. Due to the fact that what we believe about the “big picture” will influence how we act and live our lives, these virtues are incredibly important for putting life into perspective and gaining a better understanding of our true selves.

Faith is the theological virtue which allows our thought processes to transcend the tangible elements of this life. Mattison defines this virtue as, “the virtue that enables us to believe well concerning the answers to big-picture questions” (Mattison 213). This virtue allows us to believe there is something more than what we can experience with our senses in this life. The virtue of faith allows each person to come to an understanding about the big-picture questions, like whether or not there is a life beyond this one on Earth. This virtue allows us to continue in our ever-human search for truth.

The second theological virtue, hope, is the virtue that, “concerns our ultimate destiny” (Mattison 251). Some may argue this virtue is specifically Christian, or at least religious, as it implies there is another life beyond this one; however, hope is what allows one to realize there is indeed something more than this life, but what that “something” is may be different for each person and does not necessarily have to be religious. Hope drives each human person to strive for something greater because it allows us to realize there is indeed something greater than what we have in the here and now. An example of hope can be found in people like Mother Teresa who continue to work for good even in light of overwhelmingly difficult, dire, and seemingly unchangeable circumstances. Unless we have the virtue of hope, we may lose heart and may not work to achieve something better than what we already have, whether that is a higher career goal, a more giving personality, or the ambition of peace on Earth.

The last theological virtue is the virtue of love. Love has various forms and meanings. It can be defined many ways and, at least in many languages, is often given more than one name. Here though, the love which is referred to is charity, or what the Greeks would refer to as *agape*. This virtue, “enables us to live out our lives of self-giving love” (Mattison 290). This love is the ultimate love, which allows a person to transcend himself, and live to serve others. It is the complete gift of self, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in. This love, the love of charity, allows one to give of himself completely and freely without expecting anything in return. This love sustains and gives life by allowing us to move beyond our own wants and desires. Charity allows each person to live and love for the sake of love itself.

The virtues allow us to add meaning to our lives and lead us in the understanding of our true selves. Edmund Pellegrino and David Thomasma, two professors and authors specializing in bioethics, review the definitions of virtue from Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, which provide insight into how virtue provides meaning. They state, “Virtue is something within human nature that inclines us to those acts which fulfill our nature as human beings” (Pellegrino and Thomasma, 20). Pellegrino and Thomasma argue that virtue allows for humans to fulfill their human nature because the virtues “have a functional and teleological character, since they make things do their work well...and by that fact make the thing itself good” (Pellegrino and Thomasma, 7). Thus in directing us towards our true nature and what it is we find meaningful, the virtues also act to guide us towards our teleological end or our vocation. The natural and theological virtues work together in order to direct us towards what that teleological end and thus towards our calling.

While all the virtues are important for living a good life and pursuing one’s calling, vocation, or ultimate purpose, here I will focus specifically on the natural virtue of justice. The virtue of justice deals with our interactions with others in our daily lives and is thus highly important for a physician in his relationships with patients. Harvard philosophy professor Michael J. Sandel states, “For Aristotle, justice means giving people what they deserve, giving each person his or her due” (Sandel 187). Giving each person his or her due means acting rightly towards them. This begins by recognizing the fundamental human dignity of each person and acting in ways which show that we recognize this. This is also why justice can be defined as, “the [virtue] that inclines us to

good relations with others” (Mattison, 135). When we act rightly towards others, we develop good relations with them. This is only done when each person is given his or her due as a human person and is respected—an act which acknowledges the inherent dignity and worth of each person.

When the virtue of justice is practiced each person is recognized for their inherent worth and this calls us to strive towards something greater—the common good, or the set of social conditions which enable the flourishing of all members (*Gaudium et Spes*). As humans, we are a social species and thus we cannot avoid relationships with others. “We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward” (Sandel, 323). We live in relationships because we are social creatures who in our humanity share a common hope for what the future can become. When we employ justice in our world, we live in such a way that is conducive to achieving something greater for the future. We begin by living in right relationships with others around us, regardless of who they are. Living in right relations with those around us, ultimately contributes to the common good, as we begin to do our part in the world to work towards the good of all humanity. Thus, justice is important as it guides us in how to live with other people and calls us to work towards the common good.

The virtue of justice is especially important then for the physician. It is a given that people have needs, particularly healthcare needs. However, in the field of medicine, certain “needs” are often debated as such. Certain treatments in the field of healthcare are often labeled as unnecessary because the insurance company does not want to pay for

it, it will not be cost or time effective for the hospital, the physician does not have time for it, etc. A plethora of excuses can be found to argue that certain healthcare treatments are not “necessary” and to prevent a patient from receiving treatment. These excuses often do not find their origins in the science of medicine though. Instead, patients often do not receive the healthcare treatments they need because of external reasons and biases, most frequently those which deal with monetary issues.

Now, let us return to examine baby Annie’s case with the virtue of justice and discuss some ways in which this may affect the physician’s approach. If the virtue of justice is present when approaching Annie’s case, the physician will take into account what is each person’s due as well as society’s due and the common good. This means considering what the parents’ due is and what the child’s due is, and how best to recognize and uphold the human dignity of all three, while still promoting the common good and recognizing what is due to society. This, of course, does not make an obvious answer appear, but it does allow the physician to consider his or her choices more deeply. The physician who implements the virtue of justice may consider how providing extensive treatment would affect each person involved. The physician may consider that for the child, this would mean a prolonged life, which could potentially be lived in a mostly vegetative state. However, it would provide more time for the parents to spend with their child, regardless of her physical and mental states. On the other hand, the physician will also consider the benefits and results of not providing treatment, which could potentially contribute towards the common good. These would include preventing Annie from having to endure any further suffering, a life lived completely dependent

upon others and little to no awareness of the world, and constant trips to and stays in the hospital. For her parents, this option would mean a life without their child, but also a life without the immense heartbreak of caring for a completely dependent child and the financial hardship of extensive medical care. Not providing treatment may also allow society more access to healthcare in that any energy or materials used to treat Annie could be used instead for another child or for preventative prenatal care for many children. Also, if Annie's family is financially reliant on the healthcare system and the government, not providing treatment would prevent society from paying for Annie's treatment. The virtue of justice will prompt the physician to examine the questions of "What is each persons' due in this case?" and "Which decision will best promote the human dignity of both the child and the parents while still working towards the common good?"

This is why justice is so important for the physician. When one recognizes a human person as such with inherent human dignity and certain needs or "dues," then it becomes easier to realize what is necessary to maintain this human dignity and ensure each person receives what is due to him or her. The just physician will always consider the inherent worth of his or her patient and the patient's family and will be more likely to base his or her decisions on what is best for the patient opposed to material cost or inconveniences.

Justice directs the physician towards right relationships with his or her patients and calls the physician to work towards the common good. This call to individual patients and the common good overall helps the physician see his or her profession as a

vocation. It helps to answer the question of “To whom am I called?” In practicing the virtue of justice, the physician begins to work for something larger than just his or her own desires. The physician finds a more meaningful purpose in his or her relationships with patients and how they are carried out.

Natural virtues, like that of justice, help the physician find meaning in his or her practice of medicine by directing his actions towards a higher earthly purpose, in the sense of how he or she should act for the betterment of other people. Theological virtues also provide meaning. The meaning though often involves more than just a purpose for this life. Theological virtues direct the physician’s vocation towards a higher calling and purpose. This purpose does not stop at the common good, but rather is the reason behind why the physician should work towards the common good. These virtues pertain to the “big picture” beliefs, such as why we work towards bettering the world in the first place. These can be incredibly important as motivating factors for the physician.

The theological virtue which has an incredibly powerful transformative value in the meaning of medicine is that of charity. In gaining a better understanding of this virtue, meaning can be found in one’s life, particularly in the reasons behind relationships with others, and from this, more of one’s true self can be recognized. This is especially true in the vocation of a physician. Charity is known more commonly as unconditional love (Lewis). For Christians, its most perfect example is found in the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the complete gift of oneself to others. Thus “it is the virtue of charity that enables us to live out lives of self-giving love” (Mattison 290). Unless the virtue of charity is employed in our lives, we will be unable to fully give of ourselves to others.

Charity provides a deeper meaning to all the work we do and allows us to fully realize our vocation.

This virtue of charity allows us understand our connections to others and the importance of living in right relationships with them. Love calls us to something more important and bigger than ourselves by asking us to go beyond our individuality and our own wants and desires. Viktor Frankl, author, psychiatrist, and Auschwitz survivor, states, “Being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself” (Frankl 115). It is in going beyond oneself and giving of this self that one comes to find one’s true self and realize meaning in life. This is necessary if one wishes to live out one’s vocation.

In addition to allowing a person to live for more than himself and finding his vocation, charity also allows us to understand the value of the other virtues. “Charity is the ordering virtue...the source of resolution of internal conflict as well as the rectification of the passions, directing them to their proper ends. All the other virtues are reduced to, and are subservient to, this virtue of charity” (Pellegrino and Thomasma, 19). Charity provides one with reasons to employ the other virtues in one’s life. One is called to live in right relationships with others not because one receives some sort of benefit, but because charity calls one to give of himself. It is the virtue that calls us to give simply for the sake of giving. For example, in the medical field one may not always want to spend extra time with a patient, perhaps because of a long and stressful day or the

demanding personality of the patient; however, charity calls the physician to nonetheless give of him or herself as fully as possible by approaching the patient with a caring attitude and as much effort as he or she would give any other patient. This virtue calls each person to make a complete gift of one's self to another without expecting anything in return and in spite of what is unlovable, flawed, and broken in those we are called to love.

When the physician employs the virtue of charity, his profession becomes profoundly meaningful. Love helps the physician to answer the question "to whom am I called?" The virtue of charity is ultimately what each person is called to in some form. For the physician, charity transforms the practice of medicine to a call to serve people through medicine. Charity motivates the physician to give himself to his patients through love, restoring what is broken, by his work.

In the case of baby Annie, the virtue of love will first call the physician to serve Annie's family and their child through the abilities he or she has as a physician. If charity is not employed by the physician, it would be easy to make a decision based on ease of treatment, time spent in treatment, or cost of treatment. Instead though, when charity is present, the physician will desire to serve the family. Charity will prompt the physician to ask, "How best can I serve both Annie and her family?" "Do I serve them in providing all treatment possible at any cost? Or does not treating Annie and allowing respiratory failure to ensue serve the parents and child better, in preventing prolonged suffering, financial hardships, and medical care that may extend Annie's life, but only in the form of continuing her fully dependent state?" The lens of Christian love allows the

physician to begin his or her approach by recognizing the human dignity of each person and to address the needs present based on this understanding.

These virtues help guide the physician in his or her calling and how best to live in right relationship with others through the gift of self. The virtues also allow us to continue the dialogue with our inner selves and the world around us so we may understand what is meaningful to us, and where this fits in our vocation.

IV: Jesuit Values: *Cura personalis* and *Men and Women for Others*

The values we each have in our lives shed light in the discernment of our vocation. The values each person holds give a distinct look at what we each see as meaningful, which is determined by our true selves. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the Jesuit Superior General from 1983 to 2008, provides a definition of value stating, “A value literally means something which has a price, something dear, precious or worthwhile and, therefore, something that one is ready to suffer or sacrifice for, which gives one a reason to live and, if need be, a reason to die” (Kolvenbach 2). The values one holds resonate and stem from one’s “true self” or the core of who each person is. Kolvenbach goes on to state, “[Values] identify a person, give one a face, a name and character. ... Values are central to one's life and define the quality of that life, marking its breadth and depth” (Kolvenbach 2). In realizing what it is we find to be meaningful, precious, and worth living for, we can begin to discover where, what Beuchner calls, our “great gladness” is found. This is done in understanding more of our identity, where our passions lie, and what we as individuals find as meaningful. Our virtues reflect our values and are thus the ways in which we embody them. For instance, if one values social justice, he or she will most likely live this out through some form of community service opportunity. In essence, we “let our life speak” as Palmer would say, by living according to our values.

My Jesuit education at Regis University has prompted me to examine what it is I find as truly meaningful. It has made me question why I live my life the way I do and what I find meaningful my life, and so I want to now examine the Jesuit values found at

Regis. I will focus specifically on two Jesuit values which have been especially important to me and my journey to becoming a physician.

Jesuit education focuses on values pertinent to striving towards the common good and the greater glory of God. This value-centered education allows students at Jesuit institutions to discover more about themselves in relation to the world around them, and how best they, as the unique individuals they are, can address the world's needs. Jesuit colleges and universities "make their essential contribution to society by embodying in our educational process a rigorous, probing study of crucial human problems and concerns" (Kolvenbach 2). Thus, to allow students to become leaders who will be able to make a positive impact on the world, Jesuit institutions open students' eyes to human problems and impart values which address these issues.

There are several values which are consistent among all Jesuit colleges and universities, which students learn throughout every study and course. These values are central to the Jesuit education and are part of what sets these institutions apart from others. The values which can be found at every Jesuit educational institution are "finding God in all things, *cura personalis*, *magis*, men and women for others, and faith seeking justice" (Creighton University). There are variations of these and other supplemental values found at Jesuit institutions, but these are the five predominate values at every Jesuit college and university. These are consistent among Jesuit institutions of higher education because they focus specifically on developing a world awareness and compassionate heart (Traub, 393).

The first value of finding God in all things calls one to seek God everywhere in the world. George Traub, a Jesuit, says, “Ignatian spirituality is summed up in this phrase. It invites a person to search for and find God in every circumstance of life, not just in explicitly religious situations or activities” (Traub, 394). This value calls people to acknowledge the great wonder that is God’s work in everything and everyone around us. It makes people more sensitive to seeing the world and its inhabitants as the wonderful, magnificent creations they are. This perpetuates a deep appreciation for all of creation and helps develop a sense of greater meaning and purpose for all things.

The next value found at Jesuit institutions of higher learning is that of *cura personalis*. *Cura personalis* is Latin and means “care for the [individual] person” (Traub, 391). This value focuses on caring for the “whole” person or the human person in his or her entirety as a special, unique, created child of God. *Cura personalis* calls one to recognize the inherent human dignity of each person regardless of their age, sex, state of life, talents, abilities, etc. The value of *cura personalis* shapes an individual to see his fellow human as another person who must be cared for and respected as such.

The value of *magis* is unique to Jesuit institutions and stems from one of Ignatian spirituality’s main focuses. It is Latin for “more” but has been interpreted in the past with several variations including “the better way” and the “more universal good” (Geger, 8). The value calls one to look closely at every situation and consider deeply which choice would lead to the “more universal good.” This would be a choice that promotes the fullest human flourishing overall in a way that glorifies God. *Magis* asks that each person do his or her best to rise to the full potential for which God created him or her.

Men and women for others is the value found at all Jesuit institutions which essentially sums up the purpose of Jesuit education. This is the value that is held because these institutions seek to produce men and women who strive for love and justice for the, “least of their neighbors” (Traub 400). This value teaches that we must live lives of service. We must give of ourselves for the betterment of the world and our fellow man.

The fifth value found at Jesuit institutions is that of faith seeking justice. This value teaches that we must “seek justice for all God’s creatures, especially the poor and marginalized. According to the Gospel, our goal is to work for the betterment of society as a whole” (Creighton University). This value shapes people to work towards the common good. It invites everyone to recognize where injustice is present in the world, and upon this realization, to act in ways which will counteract it to produce justice. It allows one to realize that justice should be imparted to everyone and the world itself because all are God’s creation, and so are sacred.

These five Jesuit educational values allow one to begin his or her understanding of what he or she finds meaningful. These values open the eyes of Jesuit students to see that life is about more than just themselves. There is a great world beyond our classrooms, offices, and homes, filled with multitudes of people and incredible needs and hungers which go unmet and unaided every day. The Jesuit values call people to see this and to take action because this is what gives meaning and purpose to life.

While all five of these values help to accomplish this goal, the two which have been incredibly significant in understanding my true self, and which I feel are incredibly important to physicians, are those of *cura personalis* and men and women for others.

The first, *cura personalis*, focuses on the recognition of the human person as a whole being and how to care for people as such. The second invites us to take that recognition and start doing something about it through our actions. The value of men and women for others is also heavily dependent upon the virtues of justice and charity. After we recognize that the whole person must be cared for, we utilize the habits of right relations with others and the gift of self to others in order to become men and women who live in service of the world.

I will begin with the value of *cura personalis*. The previous overview discussed how this value focused on the recognition of the whole person. This value asks us to demonstrate a high regard for each and every person's inherent human dignity. It is the value that asks us to acknowledge one another's worth and value. *Cura personalis*, "suggests individualized attention to the needs of others, distinct respect for unique circumstances and concerns, and an appropriate appreciation for singular gifts and insights" (Georgetown School of Medicine). In understanding that each person is unique and has distinct and special gifts, we are better able to know how to give of ourselves to them. In order to truly care for patients, the physician must see every patient as a whole human person. It allows us to give specialized attention to each person based upon who he or she truly is at his or her core.

Kolvenbach states, "Cura personalis' is expressed in the human acts of 'giving' and 'receiving', an act of transmission and consequently of reception" (Kolvenbach,10). In order to "care for the whole person" we must be able to give of ourselves to another. In this sense, the value of *cura personalis* teaches us not only something about others but

also about ourselves. We begin to recognize something about how we give or utilize the virtue of charity. We must understand that loving others means giving of oneself completely and unselfishly to another. *Cura personalis* invites us to investigate what each person needs based upon his or her whole and individual personhood and then to give based on our personhood. To care for another requires us to understand the other. Only then can we use our individual talents, gifts, passions, and true self to directly address specific needs and hungers of the human community.

Cura personalis also utilizes the virtue of justice or right relations with others. In coming to understand who another is and how to care for him or her, we are able to live in right relationships. In recognizing what each person specifically needs and always acknowledging their human dignity and value, we are able to ensure each person receives his or her due. This is when caring for another is transformed into something about more than meeting basic needs. *Cura personalis* through the virtues of charity and justice allows us to fully care for the entire person by addressing their specific needs through an unconditional gift of ourselves in right relations.

So why is this important for a physician? As physicians, the call is to heal the sick, mend the broken, and aid those in need. The use of *cura personalis* in medicine asks physicians to, “give not only of our knowledge, expertise and skill, but of ourselves” (Creighton) This then transforms the care given. As the Creighton University School of Medicine states, “The care given, and the care received, is ‘personal care’ not ‘institutionalized care’” (Creighton). Through the integration of *cura personalis* which employs the virtues of charity and justice, the practice of medicine is transformed into an

act of healing, caring, and ministry, opposed to the typical clinical, impersonal, and “institutionalized” care which is too often seen.

In the case of baby Annie, this means approaching her, her family, and the plan of treatment as more than just another case or number in the hospital. A physician in the emergency department of a children’s hospital will encounter many cases such as Annie’s each year. It would be easy to discount each case as just another number and course of treatment, but the physician who lives out the value of *cura personalis* will not do this so easily. The physician who values *cura personalis* will address Annie and her family, as well as all his patients, as individuals with unique needs. This means seeing Annie and recognizing her human dignity, despite her physical condition. It also means taking into consideration her family’s wishes and needs, their spiritual needs, and how best to heal Annie, even though her physical condition may not be treatable. The value of *cura personalis* will prompt the physician to take into consideration not just what to do for the issue of respiratory failure, but also to consider what else can be done, such as having a priest present to pray with the family if they are Catholic, to provide Annie with the most humanistic and holistic care possible.

The second Jesuit value which I think is extremely important to focus on is that of men and women for others. This value is highly significant to the discernment of one’s vocation. This value asks us to become people who serve others and not just ourselves. It makes service important and relevant to each person as an individual with specific gifts, talents, and passions. This value calls us to utilize these in order that we may begin to serve the world where our “deep gladness meets the world’s deep hunger.” We do this

by becoming men and women who live for others. As stated by the twenty-eighth Jesuit Superior General Pedro Arrupe, we must be “men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce” (Arrupe). According to the Jesuits we are called to serve God and in so serving Him, to serve those around us. As disciples and creations of the one who loved us into being, we must extend that love outwards. In doing this, we begin to see our true selves radiating outward and in this our lives are more meaningful and find greater purpose.

Again, the virtues are essential to living out this value. Charity is especially applicable to this value. In order to be able to give ourselves in service, we must be willing to overlook the flaws, brokenness, and inability to give back anything in return of those we are called to serve. This only comes when we begin to employ the virtue, or habit, of unconditional love. When this becomes a habit in our lives, we no longer ask why we should give of ourselves and become men and women for others. Instead, we just do because it is what charity calls us to do.

To become a man or woman for others justice must be coupled with love. If justice is right relations with others and ensuring each person receives his or her due, love must also be present. Father Pedro Arrupe stated, “How can you love someone and treat him or her unjustly? Take justice away from love and you destroy love. You do not have love if the beloved is not seen as a person whose dignity must be respected, with all that that implies” (Arrupe). Thus, when love is present, justice follows. If you love someone,

see and acknowledge his or her human dignity, and work to make a gift of yourself, you will be able to live in right relationship. The virtues of charity and justice then incline one to become a man or woman in service to others. Unless these virtues or habits are present in a person's life, he or she will not be able to embody the motivation and reason for becoming a man or woman for others.

This is a goal for many, if not all, vocations, but it is particularly important for the vocation of a physician. To be a physician is to care for other people who are sick, broken, and most certainly unable to give the same care in return. In order to truly embody the vocation of a physician, one cannot go into the field simply to make money or achieve a title. That will leave the practice empty and impersonal. The physician must consider not only the patient's medical issues and history, but also the human dignity of the patient, the emotional, spiritual, and mental characters of the patient, the patient's family, background, and culture—the physician must see the bigger picture behind the ailment which brings the two in contact. Thus, *cura personalis* becomes essential for a physician to heal his patients.

In addition, to be a man or woman for others is truly what being a physician is about. It is true that a physician must be proficient in science, critical thinking, and the practice of medicine, and should enjoy these. If these were not true, he or she would most likely not have become a physician. However, the vocation of a physician goes beyond the technicalities and calls the physician to consider not only his talents and passions, but also the needs of his patients and how best to address those. This is where he must desire to serve the patient. In putting his talents and passions to work in

addressing the deep hungers and medical needs of those who are broken and sick, the physician becomes a man or woman who lives to serve others. In essence, the physician cannot fully embody his or her vocation unless he or she embraces the value of becoming one for others.

For baby Annie, this means approaching her not as a neurologically impaired individual who will most likely never have what society would generally consider a life worth living. Instead, *cura personalis* and living in service to others call the physician to approach baby Annie as a human person who is in need of more than just a medical treatment. As a human person, and especially as an infant, Annie needs compassion, tenderness, and genuine care from her physician. The physician may not have the perfect answer or solution for a course of treatment, but the physician can always allow for healing to occur. Perhaps this simply means providing the family with some sort of peace of mind that their child is in good hands, and they will be able to stay informed and be involved in as much of the treatment as possible, or simply ensuring that Annie always has a warm blanket in a cold hospital. This can only happen though when the physician recognizes the need to care for the whole person and to truly practice medicine as a service to others.

Having examined the Christian virtues and Jesuit values, let us now explore in more depth the transformative quality these have in the vocation of a physician.

V: The Vocation of a Physician

We have examined the Christian virtues, particularly those of justice and charity, and the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women in service of others. Now we will explore further how these apply to and enhance the vocation of a physician. Perhaps the best way to begin is to determine what the physician is actually called to do. How is the physician to address the needs of the world, and what does this require? Here I will examine what is required of the physician in school and in the practice of medicine. Then I will discuss how the virtues and Jesuit values supplement the technical requirements of being a physician. Finally, I will provide examples of how these make a difference in the practice of medicine, through two interviews with medical professionals. Let us begin with technical standards most U.S. medical schools require.

Every medical school in the United States requires five technical standards as set by the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC). These are observation, communication, motor, intellectual-conceptual integrative and quantitative abilities, and behavioral and social attributes. Observation means a medical student must be able to effectively observe demonstrations, labs, and interactions with patients. Communication is required as medical students must be able to effectively communicate to patients and peers. Motor skills are required as medical students must be able to interact with and diagnose patients, perform labs, and provide medical treatments. The fourth technical concept is intellectual-conceptual, integrative, and quantitative abilities. These are required to ensure a medical student can reason, analyze, synthesize, and problem solve.

The final technical requirement is behavioral and social attributes. This is required in that students must be able to utilize their intellectual abilities and reason to diagnose patients, interact with compassion, develop relationships with patients, and be able to tolerate stress and heavy workloads (Mayo Medical School). While all of these are necessary and important, at least according to the AAMC who sets the standards for medical education, the last technical standard is what I would like to draw attention to.

Mayo Medical School lists the last technical standard required for all medical school students (i.e. future physicians) as behavioral and social attributes. In the description of this technical standard it states, “Students must be capable of developing mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients and others...Compassion, integrity, concern for others, commitment and motivation are personal qualities which each student should possess” (Mayo.edu). Thus, each student, before even becoming a physician, must be capable of “developing mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients,” and must possess the qualities of “compassion, integrity, [and] concern for others.” Unless a student possesses these qualities, he or she becomes less likely to even be accepted at a medical school, and will most certainly not be able to effectively complete a medical school education. These qualities are essential for the physician, as this is a calling which requires one to interact on a very personal level with people.

This goes back to understanding one’s true self. One must recognize what his or her capabilities, talents, and gifts are, and one must come to find what type of work or activity makes him or her truly happy in the sense of fulfilling one’s *telos*. In the case of the physician, these are briefly touched upon by the technical standards required for

medical school students. One must be able to fully participate in the medical education process, be able to master the coursework, form relationships with patients and peers, and have the qualities of “compassion, integrity, concern for others, commitment, and motivation.” Unless one possesses these, one cannot truly fulfill the calling of the physician.

While these are technical standards of the medical school student, it seems too often that physicians forget these. Over the last several decades, with advancing technology, medicine has come to feel very impersonal and clinical. Edmund D. Pellegrino states, “The assertion that physicians are no longer humanists and that medicine is no longer a learned profession is painful to hear because there is some truth in it” (Pellegrino, 158). So often in today’s world of medicine, physicians get caught up in the business side of things, working to treat, not necessarily heal, as many patients possible. This creates an impersonal manner and makes it easier for physicians to treat patients as simply numbers or diagnoses. When physicians act in this way, it leaves patients feeling forgotten or overlooked because their human dignity has not been acknowledged. Allow me to provide an example of what I mean.

In the summer between my freshman and sophomore years in college, I began volunteering at a hospital in my hometown. One day, I was asked by one of the CNAs to assist with a bed bath. The woman we were working with was a patient who was primarily bed-ridden due to her weight. As we worked though, we had a conversation with this woman. We treated her with respect and acknowledged her humanity, which I gave no extra consideration to as I thought all in the healthcare field would have done the

same. As the CNA and I were about finished, this woman was on the edge of tears. She began thanking us profusely. She said she had so often been treated as less than human and had been overlooked by healthcare professionals due to her size, and wanted to thank the two of us for treating her like a normal person for the first time in an incredibly long time. I was shocked, and quite frankly, my heart sank. Perhaps it was because I was naive to the world, or perhaps it was because I had grown up and been educated in the thought that each and every person has human dignity which must always be acknowledged, but I could not believe that healthcare providers would actually act in any way other than a caring and compassionate manner. It was then that I truly understood that the virtues and Jesuit values are so essential to carrying out one's vocation as a physician because they help prevent labeling each and every patient as just another number or case.

These are what make the difference, whether one realizes it or not, between treating patients and healing patients, and thus working as a physician, or answering the call and vocation of a physician. The verb "treat" is defined as, "To deal *with* in a specified way" (OED). The verb "heal" however, is given the definition of, "To make whole or sound in bodily condition; to free from disease or ailment, restore to health or soundness" (OED). Even within the two definitions, there are drastically different meanings and connotations. If a physician acts to do nothing more than "treat" a patient for his or her malady, then the physician is only addressing the illness or injury, and forgets about the person. In this sense, the patient becomes just another number or case. When a physician works to "heal" a patient though, the physician works to address not

just the injury or illness, but rather to acknowledge and “make whole” the entire human person. Healing is holistic and comprehensive. It requires compassion and acknowledgement of the whole person, not just the ailment. Why does this really matter though? It will make a better, more virtuous physician, yes. It will allow patients to feel recognized as the human persons they are, yes. But why are these so important? It is because, as a physician, you will not always be able to treat every patient who walks through your door, *but you will* have the opportunity to heal every patient.

As a physician, it will be inevitable that patients will have illnesses which there are no treatments for, illnesses which are ultimately and unavoidably terminal, and quite frankly, one thing no human being escapes is mortality. The physician’s call though is not necessarily to always prevent death, as there will be times when this is impossible. The physician’s call is to heal patients. When nothing can be done to avoid death, the physician must realize that his or her work is not finished. There is still healing to be done. Whether this is through a conjoined effort between the physician and religious leaders to care for a patient with specific spiritual beliefs, comforting the loved ones of the patient, or ensuring the patient’s wishes regarding his or her last days of life are carried out, the physician is still called to heal. In cases where the illness is not necessarily terminal, but there are no treatments for it, the physician is also called to go that extra step and bring comfort to patients and their families through actions which show that he or she truly cares about the whole person. If healing means to “make whole” then the physician is called to provide the type of care which will do this. Even if it is as simple as having an extra conversation with the patient in which the physician is

fully present, that is what this call requires. This is where the Christian virtues and Jesuit values help to transform the physician. Not only do these bring a sense of wholeness to the physician in helping him recognize more of his true self, but they also allow him to extend this true self to patients in the holistic care he provides.

The virtues are habits and values that help provide meaning in our lives. Our values are dependent upon our virtues, as they are acted out in accordance with our virtues. In order for a physician to see his or her work as a vocation opposed to just a career or a means of making money, the physician must incorporate the Christian virtues of justice and charity, and would be wise to see where the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others can be implemented in the practice of medicine.

The virtuous physician is going to see his or her practice of medicine as more than just a paycheck or means to support life. The virtuous physician will realize that his or her practice is about serving others. It is the habits or virtues of justice and charity which allow for this distinction. In the book *Helping and Healing* by Pellegrino and Thomasma, the distinction is discussed when they state, “The idea of a profession has long centered on the notion that certain activities are moral enterprises calling for altruistic service and some effacement of self-interest. When these moral aspirations are highly developed, professions become vocations” (Pellegrino & Thomasma 84). Thus, it is through the embodiment of the desire to answer a higher moral aspiration or calling that the career becomes a vocation. This can be done through the integration of virtues and values into the practice of medicine. For the physician, this distinction makes all the

difference for patients. It is what either causes the physician to approach the patient as a symptom or case to be treated or an individual human person who, regardless of their physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual state, requires healing. As Pellegrino and Thomasma state, “For the physician who sees medicine as a career only, there is no obligation to provide service for someone who cannot pay, who does not comply fully with the physician’s orders, who is ill kempt and distresses the other patients in the waiting room, who continues to drink, smoke, or overeat, who is of a different social class” (Pellegrino & Thomasma 96).

The virtue of charity is probably the primary difference between the physician’s profession versus the call to heal the sick. This virtue, “leads away from love of self and material goods and toward the dedication of self and material goods to the welfare of others” (Pellegrino & Thomasma, 147). The virtue of charity requires the physician to work not for his paycheck or title or any other self-serving interest, but rather to work for the patient and the patient’s family. This then invites the physician to work for the whole person and to serve the whole person. Thus charity calls the physician to live out the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others, even if he does not specifically think of his calling as incorporating this virtue or these Jesuit values.

The distinction between treating and healing and the call of the physician also requires a commitment to the virtue of justice, if for no other reason, because the virtue of charity requires justice. One cannot truly live out love if justice is not present for, “justice has its deepest roots in love; it is an extension of the charity we should show to others. Not to do justice would be to relapse into self-interest, to turn from love of the

other to love of self” (Pellegrino & Thomasma, 148). Love allows one to understand the definition of justice as giving each person his or her due is, “...not only what is legalistically owed, but what is called for by love” (Pellegrino & Thomasma, 149). Charity allows the physician to recognize the whole person and calls the physician to give each patient his due despite his conditions. This is where the physician begins to turn from his own interests and answer his calling to heal his patients, and work to serve them.

Thus, the virtues of charity and justice allow the physician to make the distinction between the self-serving career and the vocation of serving others through medicine. When these two virtues are present in the physician’s life, he is able to recognize the need to heal, and to do so for the entire person present in the patient. This then leads to a vocation of service to others through the practice of medicine. The physician who practices medicine simply for the high salary, the need to satisfy an overgrown ego, or some other self inspired desire, misses the call of medicine. This physician will not be able to approach his patients as more than their ailment or injury, and will not be able to heal the patient. The physician, who works for himself, will only be able to touch the surface of the life of the patient and will only be able to treat those cases which medicine and technology can help. The physician who makes charity and justice habits in his life, however, will be able to understand the difference, and will hopefully feel called to live out his vocation to love and justice in medicine. This physician will be able to understand that he must always see the whole person, and will want to live his vocation to serve others. This then allows him to heal all his patients.

To gain a better understanding of these differences in the real world, I interviewed two medical professionals—one, a pediatrician and the other, a nurse midwife. Both women attended Jesuit colleges and through their experiences there, now live out their vocations with the Christian virtues and Jesuit values as central to their work in medicine.

The first woman I interviewed was Maria Wolff. She grew up in Minnesota, attended Catholic grade school and high school and then graduated from Creighton University. Originally, her path was not geared towards medicine. She graduated from Creighton with a degree in Spanish and a certificate in secondary education. Then she became a volunteer teacher at Red Cloud High School, which was formerly a boarding school called Holy Rosary Mission, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Here her vocation began to take a turn in direction. She said many of her students were young mothers, which compelled her to get involved with the young parents. She began spending time at the Indian Health Services, where she saw the extraordinary care and education being provided to these young mothers by the Certified Nurse Midwives. She saw how great of an impact this had on the community, which was socially and economically oppressed, and dealt with heavy issues such as chemical dependencies. The deep need of this community and the inspiration she felt seeing the midwives care for these young women prompted her to return to school in order to pursue advanced training which would allow her to continue her role as an educator in wellness.

Maria received her RN degree and then pursued a graduate degree in Nurse Midwifery. She told me she felt that the ideal of service to others, which she learned not only from her parents, but also from her Jesuit education, the influence of her church

which spreads the message of inclusion and social justice, the gift of her compassion, and the calling she felt to nurture and promote the health of others have all helped shape her vocation. She feels vocation is a “calling that derives from inherent gifts.” Through her experiences, Maria has come to understand her work as a part of her vocation, though she also feels that vocation encompasses one’s entire life. Her experiences, gifts, and talents have allowed her to actualize her inner calling in the roles of Nurse Midwife, educator, and mother of her own children.

The second woman I interviewed was Lauri Pramuk. Lauri is from Grand Junction, CO. She received a BS in Biology and BA in English Literature from Regis University, and then graduated from University of Colorado Health Sciences Center with her MD. Originally she had considered going to medical school, but was not certain this was what she wanted to do. An especially powerful experience which helped her to realize her calling to medicine came in her senior year at Regis. She was living in the Romero House and as such was involved in community service in a Denver Latino neighborhood. Here, she and her peers worked with people who attended the church that cosponsored Romero House. One day, they gave a survey to the community which asked questions about the need and desire for a medical clinic. She said they found an overwhelming response to the survey and discovered truly how much the community suffered from issues such as alcoholism and domestic abuse and was in need of good medical care. This was ultimately what helped her realize she should go to medical school. This experience was what Lauri called a “true eye-opener” as it showed her the

cost of social poverty in the lives of people and made her realize she could work to change issues like this through the gift of medical care.

Lauri said her Catholic faith inspires just about everything she does. Her time at Regis opened her eyes to the theories and importance of social justice and living in service to others. She told me she would define vocation as “work that gives meaning to your life and the lives of others,” however; she also said her career, while a part of her vocation, is not the entire realization of her vocation. Lauri also works with Xavier University’s medical mission trips to Guatemala and has several children of her own, which are the other areas in her life she sees her vocation realized. Essentially, her interactions with others, her ability to provide medical care, and the ideal of living in service to others, whether it be her patients, the people she works with in Guatemala, or her family, have all shaped how she sees vocation and how she has come to actualize it in her life.

These two women are wonderful examples of how the virtues of charity and justice are necessary in the practice of medicine and how with these two virtues, one begins to also value the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others. Even if these are not specifically stated, it is evident in the way these women speak of their vocations and how and why they were called to them, that these virtues and values are present and necessary in making the distinction between just a profession and a calling.

One may begin to wonder whether or not it is actually possible then to even go into the field of medicine without these virtues and values. After all, medicine is

inherently about service to others, even if one does not realize this. Unfortunately, it is entirely possible though. Not only have I witnessed it through my own experiences working in hospitals, but have also heard stories from patients about how their physicians did not seem to care or see them, and stories from physicians who have colleagues who do not seem to incorporate the virtues or values. In fact, during my interview with Lauri, she began to explain why she chose the specific field of pediatrics. She said she had considered OB/GYN originally as she had wanted to deliver babies, but during her rotation in medical school, that changed when she experienced the way in which the entire field was approached by the physicians. She said that it was a field which many women went into because surgery is often dominated by men and this gave them the opportunity “to be glorified as surgeons.” She said, in her experience, it was not a field about the patients and what was best for mothers and babies, but rather the opportunity for women in the medical field to become surgeons with a more manageable schedule, and without the competition from men to enter the field. Lauri said she wanted to be in a position which allowed her to be surrounded by colleagues who truly cared for the patients and wanted to make a difference not in their own lives, but in the lives of others. Thus it becomes apparent how important these Christian virtues and Jesuit values become in medicine, even if one does not specifically define them as such.

Through the incorporation of the virtues of charity and justice, and meaning in the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others, the physician begins to answer the call or vocation of medicine to heal and help patients. These make the difference between the profession which satisfies the desires of the self, versus the

vocation which calls one to serve others. In medicine, this distinction means the difference between treating patients as cases, symptoms, and ailments and healing patients as whole people with inherent human dignity who require more than just science and technology to address their needs.

VI: The Case of Baby Annie

How does this all play out when addressing cases such as baby Annie's then? Where and how do the virtues of justice and charity and the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women in service to others come into play in the practice of medicine, especially in difficult situations? I believe it begins with the approach the physician takes not only to the vocation of medicine, but also to each and every case within the practice of medicine.

In the case of baby Annie, this will play out in the physician's approach and decision. A physician who does not employ the virtues of justice and charity and the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others may actually have an easier time of deciding what to do in this situation. These virtues and values in a sense complicate the situation, but for the better. They force the physician to stop and really think about what she is doing and how her decision is going to affect not only this baby, but also the baby's parents and society as a whole. The virtues and values do not necessarily make tough decisions in the practice of medicine any easier, but they do allow the physician more tools and a greater understanding of the human condition when trying to choose between one difficult option and another.

As a future physician who holds these virtues and these Jesuit values to be incredibly important in life and in the practice of medicine, here is how I would go about approaching baby Annie's case:

The first thought that would enter my mind would be the fact that Annie is a human person with inherent human dignity, which must be upheld, and as such, she has a right to live. Life itself is valuable, regardless of its state or condition, and as a physician one is obligated to promote life and do no harm; therefore, I would treat Annie for respiratory failure. Yes, this may result in a vegetative state and a lot of suffering, both on Annie's part and her parents, but as a Christian, I believe life is still valuable and it is not just for me to decide that someone should live or die based on the conditions of their life. In this decision, I employ justice, as one of the things due to Annie is the chance to live life. In addition, charity is employed, as this virtue causes one to recognize or see another's humanity, and give of oneself in the course of the practice of medicine.

As for Annie's parents, well, in this situation they desperately want their child to live, regardless of the state her life may be lived in. Thus the most just and loving choice is to provide the type of care necessary so they may have at least a little more time with Annie. Along with providing treatment, the value of *cura personalis*, would prompt me to take things further than just the medical treatment of their child though. I believe in order to fully acknowledge the whole personhood of Annie and her parents, a more personal type of care must also be implemented. This may take the form of a deep discussion with Annie's parents about what her life will possibly look like and the life-long assistance which will be needed if she goes into a persistent vegetative state. It may also take the form of some sort of acknowledgement of their religious beliefs, and how best to carry out treatment based upon their religious principles. In order to fully implement the value of *cura personalis*, I, as the physician, would have to give as much

of myself in serving this family as possible by taking the time to educate them on the possible options and outcomes surrounding their child's life.

Implementing the virtues and Jesuit values would be important not only in the approach to Annie and her family, but also when considering how this specific case will affect the rest of society and the common good. While treating Annie may result in less funding for other healthcare needs in the world, I do not believe it would be entirely just to make a decision based only on what society thinks is good. I believe that promoting the human dignity of the individual is of the utmost importance when serving the common good. I believe this comes before financial obligations and considerations because human life is inherently more valuable than monetary prices, and unless this is recognized, there is no real purpose or meaning in medicine anyways. Thus for society as a whole, treating Annie would be a better route as it is the route which promotes human dignity and worth.

VII: Conclusion

In examining this case, and the overall tenants outlined throughout this thesis, I have learned a lot. I have come to a greater understanding of just how important it is to be a Christian humanistic doctor, and have realized that this is most fully actualized when the physician sees her work as a true vocation or call from God. In understanding the call to medicine as something one is specifically designed and purposed for, one begins to recognize the meaning in medicine. In my own personal life, I know I have been created with the skill set to become a physician given my aptitude for science, abilities to think critically, and capacity to care for others, among other things. I also know however, that this is a call which was not created specifically to serve my own interests. Through my Christian faith and Jesuit education, I have come to learn about the virtues and Jesuit values. I have specifically found those virtues of charity and justice to be profoundly important in my life, and these led me to pay particular attention to the Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others. Given that I have felt called to the vocation of a physician for a long time, I have often contemplated how these virtues and values fit into my life specifically as a future physician. What I have found is that these call me to go beyond myself and to fulfill this vocation by addressing the needs of others. I know what my own interests are, but the Christian virtues and Jesuit values have called me to question where and how I might put my interests and talents to good use serving the world.

Ultimately, I believe the call of the physician is to heal, and to do so in a way that emulates “the great physician”—Jesus Christ. As a Christian, I believe Christ is the ultimate healer, and so as a physician, it is important to follow his example. This means caring for the sick, dying, and broken in ways that go beyond just the physical ailments. The physician is called to take the next step, to stand in solidarity with his or her patients as they suffer, and to, on some level, care for their soul as well. In doing this, the physician begins to actualize the call to serve the whole person and begins to heal patients in a more holistic way.

The practice of medicine is an opportunity to serve. I know I was designed to be a physician, but I also know that it does not mean a whole lot if I only practice medicine to serve myself. Justice and charity call me to become a better Christian in all that I do by following Christ’s example, particularly in my future practice of medicine. The Jesuit values of *cura personalis* and men and women for others serve as guides in how to go about doing this by prompting me to ask the deeper and more important questions like why I am serving in this way. In turn, these questions will allow me to become a better physician by serving my patients in a way that imitates Christ and is about so much more than just science and technology. In essence, I have come to see this future practice of medicine as not just a career, but a highly meaningful way in which I am called to serve the world with the personal gifts and talents created in me by God.

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