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Augsburg College

TILL & KEEP



a journal on vocation

Stories of Call

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Till & Keep is a journal published by Exploring Our Gifts at Augsburg College, a program for the theological exploration of vocation funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. It is made by and for members of Augsburg and the greater academic community who are interested in exploring vocation and the interplay between faith and learning. For more information on the journal and other programs sponsored by Exploring Our Gifts, contact the co-editor, Diane Glorvigen, at <glorvige@augsb.org>.

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“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”
—*Genesis 2:15*

(*NRSV*)The name of the journal, *Till and Keep*, echoes God’s purpose in placing humanity in the garden of Eden. It reflects a central theme of vocation—the call to service in God’s world.

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VOCATION

TRUSTING THE CALLER

by Juliana Sedgley

There is one fundamental question that I have often confronted internally when discussing vocation, or “calling,” with others: Can you hear your call if you don’t trust the Caller? I am not one who thrives or relies on blind faith, or perhaps even on faith with eyes wide open. I rarely “just know” things, and I have never heard a voice from above. In everything that I have ever done, including in my spiritual life, I have questioned and questioned again, at every turn. Sometimes I have felt that this constant doubt has made me a very bad believer. Certainly, it has made my understanding of vocation difficult.

Already, not yet even 30 years old, I have had several jobs or careers. I began college as an English major, graduated in ancient studies, and received my M.A. degree in Greek and archaeology. I got my first “real” job in retail, then worked in the liturgical department at a Roman Catholic church, spent some time substitute teaching at a Montessori School, and finally assisted with the Lilly vocation program at Augsburg College. Each job had its rewards, each was meaningful in its purpose, each was respectable, and each required the use of at least some of the gifts I had been granted by God. But in none of them was I answering the call that I came to know as my own. In many of my positions, I was answering the calling of a professor, or family, or an ambition society told me I should have. Eventually, I realized that my calling was closer to home ... to family, to motherhood. Yet it was not a call that was proving easy to answer, despite the fact that it seemed the simplest call of all.

Over two years ago, I learned that I could never have children. My doctor told me over the phone. I had been awaiting her call for some days and realized when she insisted on speaking to me personally that she probably had bad news. “Juliana,” my doctor said to me, “the blood tests show that you won’t ever be able to have a child of your own.” Is this the kind of call the Caller makes to a mother?

I began to question whether I correctly understood the callings of my heart and mind. Was God trying to tell me that I was not meant for motherhood? And, if this was the case, was his plan for me really the right one? Was he trying to help me, or was he trying to punish me? Despite my proper Lutheran religious education, I had asked these questions before. I asked them as a child when my mother died, I asked them when I became sick as a teenager, I asked them when violence struck my family, I asked them when my oldest brother died suddenly in a cycling accident. How could I trust a Caller who seemed to have such an odd plan for my life?

There is no easy answer to that question. But it would be dishonest to pretend that the question does not exist. Trust is an unsteady emotion, and often, even for those for whom faith does not come easy, it must be taken on faith. I am not a theologian, but I can tell you my story, how it ends and how it begins.

I am a mother now to a beautiful boy, whom I found, was waiting for me, on the other side of the ocean. My husband and I decided a year ago to adopt a toddler from Ukraine. Why Ukraine as opposed to the United States or another country? I had worked in Ukraine as a student and archaeologist and respected and loved its people and culture. Why a toddler? While I worked in the Catholic church I met a woman who had adopted two older children, and her story struck me. Why adopt at all? Because, as I began to understand as I worked with the Lilly program at Augsburg, I was right about my calling, but one’s calling did not have to be easy, and it could be as simple and as complicated as motherhood.

The trip to Ukraine was itself a journey of faith; it required that I trust my Caller in the most difficult, impossible circumstances. When a plane broke down in Amsterdam, our trip almost ended before it began; we missed our appointment with the National Adoption Center in Kiev to receive a referral for a child. My trust faltered. But I held on; we flew without knowing whether we would be able to adopt, and when we arrived there was another appointment waiting for us. It was that appointment that brought us to our child, to our boy.

While in Ukraine, I became a mother. I also experienced a greater restoration of faith than I had imagined possible at such a time. My husband and I named our son Edward after my brother who died so suddenly, the first-born of my mother, who also died young so many years ago. One evening in Ukraine, after driving to visit our son in his orphanage, I unknowingly narrated my faith:

The sunflowers are blooming now, and fields of them line the highway to the orphanage. Their heads turn as the day passes; each time they move we are a little closer to bringing Edward home.

We saw a cycling club in the city today. There is nothing that reminds me of my brother Eddie more than such a sight.

Edward's nannies called my mom beautiful when they saw her picture, and asked whether she was Russian.

And so sadness and hope still hold hands. Edward is so beautiful my heart is breaking.

I think I have heard my Call.

Juliana Sedgley is the former program assistant for the Exploring Our Gifts program at Augsburg College.

GLIMPSSES OF GRACE:

SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AND VOCATION

by Beverly J. Stratton

“Do 40-year-olds think about vocation differently than 20-year-olds?” Emily’s question has stayed with me since she asked it last year in the REL 100 “Christian Vocation and the Search for Meaning I” course I was teaching. As I prepare to teach REL 200, the second course of Augsburg’s new two-course requirement for all students (creatively titled “Christian Vocation and the Search for Meaning II”), I wonder what my mostly 19- and 20-year-old students might want to know about vocation.

My oldest son is 20. As a junior in college, his life is full. This week he’s helping lead new student orientation. He’s also winding up his summer undergraduate research project on the physics of gecko adhesion. He’s got packing and housing arrangements to worry about for the next week before he leaves for his fall study term in Japan. Probably most important for him right now is spending time with the love of his life before they are separated for three months. What does he think about vocation? It’s not a term he uses and not something he reflects on often. (My assessment after asking him this summer.) There will be time for that later—perhaps during his senior year, or maybe after he graduates.

It was my senior year in college when I remember first having thoughts that I now recognize as having to do with vocation. Oh, I had thought about my profession before. I made worksheets as a 7-year-old, because I enjoyed school, and giving worksheets to my friends or stuffed animals was how I played teacher. It was what I wanted to do when I grew up. I had taken courses in college to prepare me for certification as a secondary school teacher of math, Spanish, or French. But vocation was another matter. How did I want to live my life? Was it really possible to be happily married (I already was), have a family, a graduate degree, and a profession? I didn’t know if it was. While this combination was what I wanted, I didn’t think I had any role models for how to put that all together. And why didn’t guys have to think about such questions, my emerging feminist mind wondered (perhaps making false assumptions about men)?

In this article, I will not answer Emily’s question directly. Instead, I will draw on my own experience to suggest ways that 20-year-olds and their elders might think about vocation, considering this important theological concept through the lens of daily living. First, I will address a key question or assumption that I think is on the minds of some Christians, “What is God’s plan for my life?” and introduce the notion of “God nudges.” Then, I will reflect on gifts and gift-namers, places and practices, experiences, and events that have helped me to think about vocation in my life and offer questions to help you, my readers, think about possible God nudges toward vocation in your own lives.

¹ Mark Tranvik provides a helpful introduction of the concept of vocation in “Vocation at Augsburg College,” *Till & Keep: A Journal on Vocation* (Fall 2003): 1-11.

DISCERNING GOD'S PLAN

The Joseph story in Genesis 37-50 may be the strongest biblical evidence for the claim that “God has a plan for our lives.”² Nearly killed and then sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers, betrayed by his master’s wife into jail time for a false accusation of attempted rape, and forgotten by his cell-mate, after many years Joseph finally achieves release, recognition, and status for his gifts as an interpreter of dreams, and he becomes a wise organizer of Pharaoh’s efforts to stave off famine. After testing his starving brothers, Joseph finally reveals himself to them, offering his perspective on their role and God’s role in his tumultuous life. “It was not you who sent me here,” Joseph says; “God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:7-8). When his brothers still do not accept Joseph’s forgiveness, Joseph reflects on his life and reiterates this view: “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good” (Gen 50:20).

Should we agree with what seems to be Joseph’s view—that God had a specific plan for his life that was meant for good? And what would this mean? If God “meant” the series of events in Joseph’s life to happen “for good,” then did God also mean for the misfortunes to happen as well? Did God plan the bad things too? Did God plan that Joseph’s brothers should consider killing him? That they should sell him into slavery? That he should end up languishing in jail? Is God responsible for evil? Does God “plan” bad things in our lives in order to teach us a lesson (Joseph to be more humble, perhaps), to help other people (bringing the people of Israel into Egypt for their survival), or to guide us into choosing the right vocations (dream interpreter and leader in Egypt)? As the apostle Paul might say, “No way!” The gracious God whom I know from the Old Testament, from the Gospel accounts of Jesus, and through my Christian baptism never wishes or plans any harm for God’s beloved children.³

How do we make sense, then, of the Joseph story and of the troubling events in our own lives? If God does not plan them (or at least approve of them), how do we understand them? Does God have a plan for the world? Does God have a vision for us? How is God active in our lives?

Through loving presence and nurturing nudges, I would say. The stories of God’s covenant with Israel and with all people through the new covenant in Jesus show that God does have a vision, an overall ultimate purpose that will not be thwarted, a plan for the salvation—the wholeness—of the world.⁴ God’s love for Israel and for us will not be stopped by our disobedience, betrayal, idolatry, or sinfulness. God’s grace will keep seeking ways to woo us back into right relationships of justice, mercy, and steadfast love with God and with one another. (See Hos 2:14-23.)

² Some modern day Christians’ desire and assumption that God has a detailed plan is evident in the popularity, among people of various generations, of Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002). Its dedication claims: “Before you were born, God planned *this moment* in your life. It is no accident that you are holding this book.” For a voice against God micromanaging our lives, see Lewis B. Smedes, “What’s God up to? A father grieves the loss of a child,” *Christian Century* 120 (May 3, 2003): 38-39.

³ I don’t mean to oversimplify the complex nature of God’s portrayal in the Old Testament, rather to highlight and embrace that facet of ancient Israel’s picture of a gracious God that is consistent with and predates the good news of God’s love revealed again in the Gospel.

⁴ See Leslie D. Weatherhead’s *The Will of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) for helpful distinctions between God’s “ultimate will” and “circumstantial will.” For an Old Testament view, see Terence E. Fretheim, “Will of God in the OT,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 6th ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

So how does God bring about this vision, this salvation, in the messiness, suffering, and evil of the world? Through a creation that did not happen once at the beginning of the universe, but is ongoing. God is intimately involved at every moment with every being in the world, caring for and creating our wellbeing. (See Job 38-41.) I think God does this, in part, through “nudges.” God looks at the current situation, compares it with God’s vision of salvation, and then nudges us, inviting us to choose options that will bring about greater wholeness and wellness in our lives and in all of creation. How we respond to God’s nudges is our choice—a choice with consequences.

Bad things will happen. It is in the nature of the created world that suffering accompanies the birth of new life, for example, and that some creatures serve as food or die so that others may live. The Adam and Eve story reminds us that sin, suffering, and evil are also part of the world because we humans choose them. We don’t always listen to God’s commands (or more subtle nudges), so God works with us in the consequences of our behaviors, continuing to love us and to bring healing. Part of how we live our vocations, then, is to find ways to listen to God (hearing the proclamation of law and Gospel, praying, and meditating, for example) so that we can be more attuned to God’s voice nudging our choices toward God’s vision for creation.

But what about Joseph? Here’s where the experience of 20- and 40-year-olds may vary. At the end of the story when Joseph makes statements about God’s intentions, he is older than the snotty, spoiled 17-year-old who so annoyed his brothers and father with his seemingly boastful dreams (Genesis 37). The story doesn’t tell us what Joseph felt or what he thought about God as a younger person when his brothers left him in the pit, when he was carried off by slave-traders, or when he sat alone in jail for years. (It is the narrator who regularly reminds readers then of God’s presence with Joseph.) It is when Joseph looks back as an older adult, reflecting on his life from some distance, that he recognizes God’s hand.⁵

As it was for Joseph, part of the paradigm of vocation for us is the way we see our lives—looking back and discerning how God has been active. Through such reflection, we can see God working within the realities of our lives, helping us to cope with suffering, finding ways to bring new life out of the deaths into which we have been plunged, nudging us to be creative in our particular circumstances, waiting for us to pay attention, and reminding us and inviting us to choose to help bring about God’s vision for the world.

What is my vocation? What is God’s plan for my life? While it’s certainly possible, I don’t think that God has a detailed blueprint for each of our lives. Rather, God invites us into creative, worshipful, community with one another to serve and to share God’s vision as our vocation.

NOTICING THE NUDGES—SIGNPOSTS FOR VOCATION

If there’s no blueprint, no divine plan laid out specifically for my life, then how do I know whether I’m living it the way God wants me to? How do I discern my vocation? Do teens and “20-somethings” have to wait until middle age to look back on their lives to see God at work? I think God gives us signposts at *all* times of our lives, clues for how we may hear and heed God’s nudges. Here I describe some of the nudges in my life and pose questions

⁵ For a discussion of God’s changing activity in people’s lives in the book of Genesis and what this presentation may mean for its ancient and modern audiences, see Robert L. Cohn, “Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 3-16.

that may help you to consider your own God nudges.

Gifts and Gift-Namers

Many students of vocation know Frederick Buechner's phrase that vocation is "where your own deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."⁶ So one signpost for discerning vocation is to consider your gladness, and often such gladness is related to your gifts and talents. *What gives you joy? What are you passionate about? What are you doing when time flies, when you forget yourself? What are your talents? What gifts do others see in you?* Sometimes other people see possibilities and talents in us that we have not considered or have not recognized for ourselves. It is important to cherish and to listen to the gift-namers in our lives.

There have been many gift-namers in my life. A junior high teacher noticed my interest and ability in Spanish and encouraged me to travel with her and a group to Spain when I was 13. A high school math teacher invited me to think about math teaching as a vocation. (He may even have used the word vocation, an interesting and esoteric term to me at the time, like "algorithm" and the Greek letters we used for math proofs.) He arranged an opportunity for me to try it out by tutoring a younger student. Later, when I was finishing a master's program in math, a woman pastor (my first!) encouraged me to take summer Greek at Harvard and to consider ministry as a possibility.

At my 10-year high school reunion, a friend also suggested that I try seminary as a way to get credit for some study I was doing in feminist theology to prepare to teach a class. Thus began my gradual switch from teaching college mathematics to Bible, what I have come to call "returning to my first love." (Eventually, I wondered why, when I had dated so many guys who were planning to be pastors, no one during my high school days had recommended seminary to me as a way to foster my clear interest in Bible and church leadership.) One seminary professor typed a note, encouraging me to complete a Ph.D. Colleagues have named my organizational skills and encouraged my thoughtful writing. People have told me that I'm becoming a better listener as a friend, sometimes courageous in my vulnerability. And whether I'm good at it or not, no one has to tell me that I love to sing! *What are the gifts and who are the gift-namers in your life? What have you learned from teachers, friends, pastors, colleagues, and mentors about yourself and your gifts?*

Places and Practices

Sometimes it helps to go to special places or to engage in particular activities or spiritual practices in order to listen better to God's nudges. When I was a teen, Riverside Bible Camp in Story City, Iowa, was a special place for me. It was where I experienced speaking in tongues during the charismatic movement of the '70s. There I also first came to really understand grace from a fellow counselor who was a seminary student. More recently, my Roseville congregation's week of summer camp at Luther Dell and the high school youth mission trips have been blessing places for my family. My therapist's office is a special healing place for me. Retreat centers are also important to me. I often go to a hermitage at *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) in St. Francis when I want time alone with God. The Mt. Olivet Retreat Center has become a good place to gather with community to renew the "courage to teach."⁷

Probably the most special place for me is a lake cabin in New Hampshire where my family goes for a couple weeks every summer to spend time with Grandma and Grandpa Stratton and to enjoy the lake, family card games, rituals of mountain climbing and mini-golf, and lazy reading and conversation, sitting in the porch rockers. This is a loving and

⁶ *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 95.

⁷ For more on Courage to Teach programs, visit <www.teacherformation.org>.

healing, spiritually nurturing soul time for me and for my family.

Some places are more mundane but still important. There was a stairway at my church growing up. It was tucked away in a seldom-used part of the building, but I would go there when I needed to be alone to pour out my heart to God about a troubled romance or health situation, or to intercede for a friend. Now I sit in my recliner in my living room. My family knows it as “mom’s chair.” It’s where I often meditate, pray, read my favorite spiritual authors, or write in my journal—spiritual practices that have helped me to grow closer to God and to understand my vocation. There’s also my regular walking route down neighborhood streets and around a lake in the park. God and I often have words on my walks, and I don’t always listen, but it’s still a good place and practice for me. *What feeds your soul? What are your special places? Your spiritual practices? How do they help you to hear God’s vocational “call to a life well lived”?*⁸

Experiences and Events

Sometimes it is particular experiences and events that astonish us, stretch us, or reformulate our ways of thinking about ourselves and about the world’s needs. These are also signposts for vocation. You may find it helpful to identify several of these as “stepping stones” in your life. It can be helpful to let your creative side out by sitting down with paper and markers, paints, or crayons to express these stepping stones visually. Then reflect on them, journal about them, and talk about them with a couple of friends who will listen carefully. *What are some of the stepping stones in your life? How have they shaped you?*

Travel has been a stepping stone for me. When I lived with a family in Spain as a young teen, I learned that not everyone saw the world as I did. To my Spanish friends, Protestants were an unknown and suspicious curiosity. Only prostitutes shaved their legs, and even the way I used a knife and fork was strange from their perspective. Traveling as an adult to Nicaragua, Mexico, and Namibia through Augsburg’s Center for Global Education has helped me to consider the ways that my own individual choices and those of institutions like the U.S. government affect people’s lives around the world. Seeing poverty and nation-building, witnessing despair and hearing joyous people singing folk songs together, reflecting on liberation theology and the possibilities of reconciliation after apartheid—all of these have helped me to understand better the needs of the world and to think about how I may be called to serve them. *How has travel shaped you? What have you learned about yourself and about your culture from encountering others? What needs of the world might you be called to serve?*

Some vocational understanding comes as flashes of insight. At a conference, I heard an older gray-haired woman describe what she called a “knapsack of privileges” that she had as a white woman that her African-American colleagues did not have.⁹ Some were mundane, like “I can buy ‘flesh’ colored bandages that match my skin.” One really caught my attention, though, because I was pregnant at the time with my second son: “I don’t have to teach my children about systemic racism for their daily physical protection.” It’s not right, but it’s true. Dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy is one of the world’s needs that I can choose to engage.

Former students have taught me things I need to know—lived realities that shape

⁸ Listening for God’s “call to a life well lived,” among the many voices that call us, is a helpful image from Rolf Jacobson’s January 28, 2003, homily at Augsburg on vocation.

⁹ Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies,” Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Working Paper no. 189; order information available at <www.wcwonline.org/seed/unpacking.html>.

some of their life experiences. Their humanity and the challenges they face in our society have led me to take stands for the acceptance and affirmation of GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) people and to find ways to help students learn about the lives of GLBT people.

At the end of one semester, an African-American woman my age, who later became my dear friend, told me what it was like to be a student in my Biblical Studies class. She said that she had cried every day after class because no one would even look at her unless I assigned them to be in a small group with her. Racism distorts all of us. I'm struggling to understand my own racism and to find ways to teach about racism. My friends have also taught me what it means to be a friend, through their example, and sometimes by confronting me with truth about my poor behavior: "That's not the way it's s'posed to be." *What new knowledge or experiences have transformed the way you see the world? What have your insights and your friends taught you about society's needs? About friendship and vocation?*

Illness and injury have been occasions to experience God's presence and to think about vocation. When God didn't heal my scoliosis as a teen—even though I went to many healing services and prayed fervently—I had to rethink some of my theology. In the hospital on the night before my back surgery, I felt frightened and bereft. Then I remembered that Jesus might have felt the same thing in the garden of Gethsemane. I wasn't so alone.

My daughter had an accident last summer. She was in-line skating and skated onto some recently laid roadway. She fell, covering the front of her body in hot tar. I rode in the ambulance with her for the 90-minute high-speed trip from New Hampshire to the Shriner's Burn Center in Boston where they scraped off the tar in the operating room. As I looked at my daughter sleeping in her hospital bed and watched our family gathered around her in support, I knew that the love of parents and children and of siblings for one another is what life is about. My roles as mother, wife, sister, daughter, and granddaughter are important parts of my vocation. *How do you value, balance, and live your roles? How have accident, illness, or tragedy in the life of someone you loved shaped you?*

Marriage and motherhood have been testing grounds and gifts in my lifelong discernment of vocation. "Mommas have a secret; Daddies have too" is the first line of a song that hints at how indescribable, to one who doesn't already know, are the joys and challenges of being a parent.¹⁰ The physical processes of pregnancy and birth are in themselves amazing, and becoming a parent is something that changes one's life forever. My children have taught me with their guilt-tripping comments "Just go down to the den and work, Mom" (when I was heavy with doctoral study) and with their surprising pearls of wisdom. When I told my 14-year-old son that my therapy assignment for the week was to practice *not* getting everything done, he responded, with wisdom beyond his years: "Welcome to the human race, Mom."

Like parenthood, marriage can be an opportunity to live out in community a lifelong and life-giving covenant with another person. A sister from the College of St. Benedict helped me realize that such commitment to living in community is a challenge. When we promise to stay rather than leaving, we get to know, and have to learn to tolerate, one another's weaknesses as well as appreciating each other's strengths. If we are fortunate, we learn to repent and forgive. We also begin to appreciate, experience, and practice

¹⁰ On the CD by Nancy White, *Momnipotent: Songs for Weary Parents*.

unconditional love in the crucible of family and marriage.¹¹ We can be the “domestic church,” as Roman Catholics refer to the family, being a sacramental presence of Christ as we serve one another. *How have your relationships and family life shaped you? What can you learn from them about vocation?*

GLIMPSES OF GRACE—REFLECTING ON PAINFUL EVENTS IN OUR LIVES

Part of vocation is simply being—recognizing and accepting our bumps and warts, our imperfections and prickles, as part of who we are. These may also be gifts, part of being the creatures God made us to be. Seeing ourselves through the compassionate eyes of others and reflecting on the realities and even painful facets and events of our lives can help us learn about vocation.¹²

We all learn in different ways.¹³ As a trained theologian and biblical scholar, I know intellectually and can teach about vocation, grace, and forgiveness, but my heart learns more by experience. A couple of years ago I lived an experience that I hope and plan never to repeat—a painful, shameful time when I caused hurt to those I love most. Because of the stigma that mental illness still has in our society, I hesitate to tell you what I’ve learned “the hard way” from this experience, but I risk this vulnerability in case it helps you to reflect on and learn from difficult parts of your own life.¹⁴ You’ll notice also that I simply tell the story here with little reflection; it may seem fuzzy or jumbled—that’s consistent with how I experienced those days.

I had been often in therapy and regularly taking medication for major depression for about three years before my breakdown happened. Whether in spite of or because of the medications that I was taking for depression, my mood swings grew. After months of lethargy and despair, I finally felt good for several weeks. I had renewed energy that I channeled into projects for improving my workplace. I was enjoying my life again, having

¹¹ To explore nuances of marriage and family life in relation to vocation, see Augustus Y. Napier with Carl A. Whitaker, *The Family Crucible: The Intense Experience of Family Therapy* (New York: Bantam, 1980); Edwin H. Friedman, *From Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford, 1985); and a five-part Family Living in Pastoral Perspective series about individual and family development that includes a volume by Herbert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite, *Becoming Married* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993).

¹² See Parker J. Palmer’s courageous reflection on his own depression in *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

¹³ The biblical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes show two ways of knowing and learning. Proverbs hands down conventional wisdom from parent to child, teacher to student, while in Ecclesiastes, the speaker, Qohelet, learns by testing wisdom through his own experience.

¹⁴ Fortunately, there are now many medications, books, and resources to help people and families who live with mental illness. The Minnesota Depressive and Manic Depressive Association (MDMDA) holds helpful support groups in the Twin Cities area. Lutheran Social Service has a sliding fee scale and thoughtful counselors for short or long-term therapy. At Augsburg, the Center for Counseling and Health Promotion also has excellent professional counselors and a good Web site with many links at <www.augsburg.edu/cchp>. Some personal Web sites, like <www.bipolarhappens.com>, offer perspective into what bipolar disorder feels like from the inside. Kay Redfield Jamison, Professor of Psychiatry, describes her experience of manic-depressive illness in *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (New York: Vintage, 1995). See also Andrew Solomon’s comprehensive *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* (New York: Touchstone, 2001) and Daniel S. Hanson’s memoir *Room for J: A Family Struggles with Schizophrenia* (Edina: Beaver’s Pond, 2005). Of course, there is no substitute for trained psychiatrists and therapists. For some theological reflections on mental illness, see the Winter 2001 “Therapy and Theology” issue of the journal *Word & World* and William and Lucy Hulme’s book, *Wrestling with Depression: A Spiritual Guide to Reclaiming Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995).

fun in my classes and at home with my family. One weekend I felt especially creative, even a bit silly, and I didn't need much sleep. In fact, one night I didn't sleep at all.

But soon it all fell apart. My intensity increased. In my sleep-deprived state, my hypomania grew into a full manic episode that required hospitalization to settle me down and help me sleep. Before I gave in to that needed treatment and rest, however, I behaved strangely. I accosted strangers, assuming in the grandiosity of my illness that they were present primarily to allow me to demonstrate my sanity. I was unreasonably angry with my husband, not trusting him to help make decisions about my care. I manipulated my teenage son into doing what I "knew" needed to happen. I clung to my young daughter, putting her into a role she should not have had, parenting my childlike neediness for attention. My colleagues were alarmed by my loud, pressured, and sometimes crazy speech, and even as I recovered I treated some of them poorly, lashing out in bursts of anger or annoyance.

Through it all, my colleagues, caregivers, doctors, therapist, pastors, friends, and especially my family showed me patience, compassion, and unconditional love. And some did so at great cost. For example, my husband wept, as I hadn't seen him cry in 25 years, when he told our pastor the story: especially about how he had agreed with my wishes to leave the hospital against medical advice, even though the doctor had just told him that the worst case scenario if I left was that the next time he saw me I might be dead. In spite of the hurt I caused my family—some of which I'll probably never know—they forgave me well before I could begin to forgive myself. Where was God in my suffering and in the suffering I caused others? God was with me, with us—not causing the pain in order to teach me a lesson, but present with me and with my family, loving us, and holding and comforting us tenderly. Did God cause my breakdown to finally get through to me? No, it was a result of body chemistry and choices I had made. But God has been nudging me with opportunities to grow.

God has helped me to learn from this painful event in my life. I have learned about grace and trust and forgiveness. Now I am beginning to know them in my flesh, bones, and heart—not just in my head. Through their patience, presence, and steadfast love, my husband and family embodied grace for me. They were trustworthy. They have been the compassionate, healing, forgiving presence of Christ to me in my illness and recovery.

I have also learned by reflecting on my life in relation to this dramatic event—thinking, with God's help, about ways that I can live differently, about transformed ways of being. Now I recognize that constant busyness in my life may be a way of masking depression by hiding from my feelings—God's gifts to help us through the messiness of life. Now I see my previous constant efforts to "help" other people and to "fix" institutions as arrogant intrusions that may be danger signs of hypomania for me, and I am repenting—turning away from such inappropriate behaviors. For my own wellbeing, I'm learning to say "no." I'm restructuring my life to be more balanced—though as a recovering perfectionist and workaholic, I sometimes still have to force myself to make time to have fun.

WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

The ups and downs of my life have been much more mundane than those of Joseph in Genesis, and I still don't know the answer to Emily's question about whether people of different generations think differently about vocation, though I've now met 20-year-olds who have experienced more challenges and tragedies in their short lives than I have in my 45 years. I think that telling our life and faith stories honestly to one another, something I

¹⁵ Equipping congregations, youth, and families with ideas and resources for sharing our faith stories with one another is a key aspect of the mission of the Youth and Family Institute (www.youthfamilyinstitute.com).

hope I have begun to do here, is one way that people of all ages can learn about vocation.¹⁵

Over the years, I have come to formulate an understanding of my vocation as being “to live and teach the grace of God in theology and daily living.” Reflecting on events in my life has helped me begin to understand and live this vocation. Now I have experienced grace and am experimenting with ways of living it daily. Living creatively with mental illness as part of my vocation gives me greater understanding and compassion for others. It has given me glimpses of God’s grace.

By reflecting on our lives and sharing our faith, life, and vocation stories with one another, we help each other to discern God’s nudges. As Paul notes in Romans 6, Christians, who are delivered from death to life through our baptisms, are raised in worshipful community to walk in newness of life. As we walk together, courageously telling and honoring our stories, we become communities that can live our vocations by embodying, embracing, and co-creating God’s vision for the world.¹⁶

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MY VOCATION: A JOURNEY IN TWO COUNTRIES

by Emiliano Chagil

I have contemplated vocation and its role for many years, but it was not until later in life that the steps leading me to my vocation became clear. Looking back, I see my life in four stages—first, growing up in Guatemala, then working as a catechist in the rural areas of my country, later emigrating to the United States and working in the field of refugee resettlement, and today, directing Hispanic/Latino Student Services at Augsburg. What a life it has been! My experiences at each stage were often both physically and spiritually demanding. Through harsh life lessons, I came to realize that, with my faith as the foundation, I could help make the world a better place.

For me, the development of vocation paralleled the stages of physical and intellectual development that I experienced growing up. Early in my life, vocation seemed like a celestial command. Growing up Catholic, I felt that God was like a guardian, giving me guidance from above and making sure I was on the right path. During adolescence, my vocation seemed like a natural gift as I gained awareness of my skills and began to think beyond my own concerns to see my responsibility to the community. In adulthood, my role became clearer. I realized that it was not an accident or a coincidence that I lived at this time and place and had these particular abilities and gifts. God was calling me to a specific vocation, and I knew that I should listen and follow.

My religious understanding was formed by two main factors. As a child, I absorbed many ideas from the Mayan and Latin cultures, each of which had a very strong influence in the area where I grew up. The Maya practice a pantheistic religion that equates God with the forces

and laws of the universe. This religion teaches the worship of all gods of different creeds, cults, or peoples without making distinctions. In this religion, people express piety through devotional experience and practice. This Mayan worldview complimented my Christian upbringing, and I later completed a master's degree in the inspirational subject of theology. This heritage shaped my vision, and it continues to provide guidance in my approach to other people's cultures. It has given me wings to seek the winds of change and to find opportunities to share my gifts with others.

My journey of vocation began with growing up on a coffee plantation in Guatemala's western region. I was surrounded by mountains and volcanoes, with a beautiful lake nearby, but I could hardly appreciate this divine beauty because I had to live the cruel reality of the poor. I had only to look at my surroundings to see what I was called to do. The scene was like a medieval painting of landlords and peasants. The elements were all there—poverty, oppression, and people marginalized as if they were a commodity. In spite of their Christian affiliation, the landlords could not even conceive of the idea that all people were created equal. Their business practices were a form of slavery. The workers' living conditions were abysmal—meager salaries ranging from 60 to 80 cents a day, and houses as small as a two-car garage. Children were forced into labor, and most were prevented from attending school. It seemed as though the whole Biblical story of Moses was playing out before my eyes. But one mystery remained—how to save these people of God. I was too young to understand the

facts then, but today I see that one aspect of “my call” is to let the world know about the unjust suffering of the poor and from where salvation must truly come.

During my teens, I helped my parents with agricultural pursuits such as cultivating or harvesting crops while I was also attending school. With the support of mentors and scholarships, I obtained a bachelor of arts degree from a prestigious private school that led me to pursue an agricultural engineering degree in Guatemala City. As I broadened my education, I gained awareness of the social conditions of the poor and also honed my teaching, organizing, and leadership skills, all of which have served me on my journey.

As an adult during the 1970s, I worked as a catechist teaching religion in the peasant communities of my homeland. I focused on the Church’s basic principles—that human life is sacred, that oppression is wrong, and that each person possesses a basic God-given dignity. In this task, needless to say, I risked my life. Because the country was in the midst of a civil war, the government and the people of privilege found such messages threatening. Many church workers who spoke out against injustice lost their lives, and their courage and sacrifice resonates with the Gospel of John that reminds us of the offering and giving of one’s life for others as Jesus did.

In 1980, I moved to North America. After completing my graduate degree, I worked for an organization in Minnesota that resettled Central American refugees who were fleeing persecution and searching for safe haven. Once again, it was a job anchored in human rights. Our basic premise was that all people have the right to food, health care, employment, decent housing, and education, and that they should be able to raise and provide for their families with dignity. Although my life was no

longer at risk, I faced psychological hurdles that I had not anticipated. Just when I thought I had left the violence and injustice of Guatemala behind me, I found myself dealing with the same issues and helping the same people as before. At the same time, I awoke to a new realization of how much poverty, racism, and injustice still exists in the world and how the poor must continually struggle for life, dignity and advocacy. God had given me an education so that I could contribute to this mission.

From 2000 to the present, I have been assisting Augsburg College with the recruitment, retention, and advising of Hispanic/Latino students who strive for a college education. My job on campus is clearly helping me claim another level of my call—to help build the future of this great nation by supporting these students. For me this task centers on solidarity with a group that has long been underrepresented in higher education. I am proud to work for an institution founded by immigrants whose model of Lutheran education states, “As a college, Augsburg focuses on equipping students to realize and use all of their talents in service to and celebration of creation—that is, to discover and fulfill their vocation.” Each day, I am joined by many others—faculty, staff, and students—who are committed to serving others and responding to the needs of this world that is so full of inequality.

As I look back on my journey, I can now see a unifying pattern. All the stages of my life have a common theme—advocating for the less fortunate. Because of this, I have learned how much the poor can teach the people in developed countries. The poor understand something that we do not, despite all our educational degrees. Jesus is more like a brother to them, a living presence in their lives. God has a special relationship with the poor, and in reaching out to them, we ourselves can become more whole. This is one reason

we should welcome the opportunity to live together in diversity.

My life experiences have also taught me the importance of education in making the world a better place. Higher education teaches us that we are one human family despite national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. A missionary in Guatemala often told me that “education is liberation,” clearly referring to the poor’s search for salvation in the world today. However, this saying is not limited to formal academic knowledge; it also applies to an understanding of social sins such as discrimination against others or the unwillingness to love one’s neighbor as oneself. This means that education can serve as a liberating influence for developed societies as well, not just for the poor. It can help us understand that, whether as individuals or as a nation, we are called to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless.

My journey has taken me from a developing country to an industrialized country, from a collective community to an individualistic society, from danger to safety. While following that path, I have learned much about how God wants us to live. I believe that all people have a responsibility to work for the common good. When we see people burdened by poverty and injustice, we must raise our voices and speak up in their defense. When we see refugees searching for shelter in order to survive and reinvent themselves, we must open our doors and let them into our hearts. We should embrace diversity because when we do not understand each other, the common good is in jeopardy. If our institutions are depriving people of their sacred right to know the truth and keeping them uneducated and segregated, we are not living our vocation; rather, we are playing deaf to God’s call in life. Finally, we must honestly assess our efforts. We must make sure they are truly authentic

and effective and that our actions go beyond mere rhetoric and make sense according to God’s plan.

Miraculously, my vocation continues to find its course in spite of the fact that I have countless questions and few answers. I ask myself again and again: “Am I doing the right thing? Do I truly understand God in my life? Relying on my study of theology, I try to live my life as a theologian. That means that my role is to affirm that all people are our brothers and sisters and that it is through our relationships with others that we experience God. My hope is that this understanding will penetrate deeper and deeper into our society.

Today, by living my story, I live my vocation. In all four passages of my life there have been opportunities to make a difference. Just like in all the Biblical passages, there were inspiring people, sacrifices, and glorious days to be alive. God invites all of us to hear a call and begin a journey.

Emiliano Chagil is the director of Hispanic/Latino Student Services at Augsburg College.

G O D *God With Us*

SENIOR CHAPEL TALK, DECEMBER 6, 2004

by Anna Warnes

I find it ironic that I should be speaking on St. Nicholas Day. When I was a child, Christmas morning was not filled with the excitement of presents from Santa Claus. I never believed in Santa Claus; he just didn't seem very logical to me.

Christmas morning at our house was filled with a different kind of excitement. Every year through Advent we had a Christmas tree that had a small ceramic crèche underneath the lowest boughs. There were three wise men, shepherds, a donkey, a lamb, Mary and Joseph, and ... well, baby Jesus was missing. On Christmas morning, the first person to wake up got to take the ceramic baby Jesus and finally put him where he belonged, under the Christmas tree with the rest of the manger scene. So where did baby Jesus spend Advent? In Mary's womb? Maybe with God? No, in the Warnes household baby Jesus spent Advent underneath the couch.

The Advent Gospel of Matthew says, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." God with us? As a child, I thought God was under the couch!

In college, I also thought God was under the couch, and now in retrospect I see how God was with me through my years of growing at Augsburg. For me, college wasn't just about tests and jobs and activities. Sure, that shapes a college experience, but that isn't what has shaped me the most in my years at Augsburg. The events that occurred while I was at Augsburg that truly tested my faith, that made me look for God, cry out to God—those were the forces that shaped me.

In the fall of 2001, I came from a small, predominantly Caucasian town and I had no idea what Augsburg would bring for me. I was socially aware but not very experienced. Immediately, my world expanded. From the very first day of AugSem with Diane Pike and Doug Green, I was immersed in the vital, diverse community around the college. This vibrant community around Augsburg was not limited to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. This past May, I went to Thailand with Kathy Swanson, her husband Jack, and 10 other students. Our purpose was to help teach English in the schools of Prachuab, a small village on the Bay of Thailand. I had the opportunity to teach in my very own classroom at the level of Masasan 1 (mostly 12-year-olds). The only problem was that they were young enough to still struggle with their English, and I only knew about five words of Thai. It was a struggle to communicate ideas to the students in broken English, and because they didn't understand, they often misbehaved in class. I had to restrain myself from speaking louder as if they couldn't hear me. About three days into teaching, I was beat. I wanted to quit. It was so humid and I couldn't stop sweating; I had fallen and split my chin open two days earlier when running by a mountain covered with vicious monkeys (a story for another chapel talk), and the students didn't understand me! Where was God? Somehow, by the end of the week, the students knew what subjects, verbs, objects, and adjectives were (with the help of my non-spoken evil eye), and I had learned patience and the meaning of diversity and service. I guess God wasn't under the couch after all.

Halfway into my freshman year, I experienced something that would greatly affect my years to follow. I was young, naïve, and thought I was dating a very sweet college boy. He wasn't a wrestler and he wasn't a partier. But I was wrong. I grew up very quickly when

I was date raped as an 18-year-old college girl. I was furious with myself. I thought I was smarter than to fall for such a statistically common trap. I was also very ashamed of myself and I fell into a deep depression for the next year and a half. Where was God? Through the guidance of my mom, my roommate Greta, and my later boyfriend Nate, I was able to find the Center for Counseling and Health Promotion. With their help, I was able to let go of most of my shame, my anger, and my deep sadness. I began to realize how I had struggled with depression, and I learned how to deal with it in the future. Wow, God really wasn't under the couch then.

This past summer I experienced Augsburg in a way I would never have anticipated. I thought my boyfriend Nate had the flu, but within a week he was unexpectedly placed in intensive care on a respirator with a mass of tubes stuck into his body, barely clinging to life. I was lost. How do you come to terms with the possible death of the person you care about the most? Where was God? I called just two people from Augsburg, and Augsburg responded in full force—from professors to Campus Ministry to fellow students to Pastor Jane from Trinity Lutheran on campus. Nate, his family, and I felt an extraordinary outpouring of support from the Augsburg community. People visited the hospital, called with concern, and prayed for us. Nate recovered and he is now away studying in grad school. God came out from under the couch.

There were many more instances in my years at Augsburg when I felt like God wasn't present. God was hiding; God wasn't responding. It is now much easier to see where God has been during my Augsburg experience. I have directed my life, and God has embraced me along the way through the Augsburg community. I have been nurtured, I have been challenged, and I have learned. I realize that vocation doesn't mean finding the right major or the right job. It's about looking at life in a way that invites the Holy Spirit to guide your viewpoint—seeing God in your neighbor and then acting on what you see. Augsburg has taught me this not through lecture or Vocatio chapels, but through its example. The world neighborhood, the professors, the on-campus services, the students and many more entities that make up Augsburg have given me examples of vocation and in the process have helped me grow through my college experience. It is scary to think of moving beyond this community of safety and understanding. But, if I have learned anything at Augsburg, it is to take comfort in the promise of the Gospel—"Immanuel." God is with us. I know that as we wait for Jesus to come to us this Advent season, as we wait for Jesus to come to us in our everyday lives, He is already there. Just look under the couch.

Anna Warnes recently graduated from Augsburg College with a major in English.

A STORY OF MARTYRDOM AND HOPE

by Jonathan Sorum

In November 2002 Nigeria was convulsed by riots as Muslims protested the Miss World contest, which was to be held in Lagos, the capital. Many Christian churches came under attack. George Evans, 17 and just beginning studies at the university in Lagos, was worried about his family. His parents and his 20-year-old sister, 15-year-old brother, and 14-year-old sister lived in a city in northern Nigeria where the rioting had been most severe. His father, Elphius Evans, was a Christian pastor in a congregation that ministered to the poor in that city, providing basic education and micro-loans to the destitute and offering them a chance for self-sufficiency, while inviting them to faith in Christ and membership in the church. The family lived in the congregation's building, which also housed an orphanage and school. All communication to their city had been cut and George could get no news.

After three days, he was finally able to travel to his family's home. He was shocked to discover that church building was a burned-out ruin. After some frantic inquiries, he found his mother and sisters and brother hiding out in the bush outside the city. From them, he learned the heart-rending story. A mob had gathered in front of the church and George's father, his father's assistant, and some others from the church had faced the crowd and stood blocking the door while about 100 children and women in the orphanage and school escaped through the back door. In a violent frenzy the rioters killed George's father, along with the assistant pastor and several others.

The survivors of ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria are themselves in danger; they are often killed or imprisoned in order to prevent them from taking revenge or telling their story to outsiders. George's mother feared that her family would suffer this fate, so she made plans to flee Nigeria. To finance the trip, she and her eldest daughter, Susan, went into the city to sell some property she owned. While they were standing outside the house, someone attacked them and killed Susan in cold blood and in broad daylight. George's mother survived but was left even more grief-stricken and afraid. In desperation she hired traffickers—a criminal gang—to take her family to England, where one of her brothers lived.

They left in February 2003. Throughout the trip, the traffickers were extremely abusive. They gave very little food to the refugees, and they beat anyone who asked for more. George soon began to feel strange and unwell. He and his family, along with other refugees, were put into cars and transported to what was probably the border of the next country. Then the traffickers told them to get out of the vehicle and walk, promising that on the other side of the border another vehicle would be waiting for them. This happened several times, and finally George and his brother were ordered to board a small airplane. Terrified of having the family split up, their mother protested, but the traffickers assured her that she and her daughter would be on the next plane. When the plan landed, the traffickers made it clear that the brothers were to be split up. George hugged his brother desperately, protesting with all his might against losing him, but the men forcibly separated them, then knocked George unconscious and threw him into the back of a truck.

George awoke disoriented and grief-stricken. Sometime later, the traffickers began dropping off people one-by-one from the back of the truck, and when it was

George's turn, he asked where London was—assuming they were in England. Someone pointed vaguely in the direction of a city and said, "That's London." Standing alone in the road as the truck pulled away, George very quickly realized he was not in England. In reality, he was in Slovakia, and the city was Bratislava. He was very weak and collapsed. This weather was cold and wintry, so it was fortunate that someone came along to help him. This man was another African, though he was not part of George's group. He was also a refugee and was attempting to cross the border into Austria, but instead he stopped and helped the young stranger lying in the snow. George later woke up in the hospital, where he learned that he had a bleeding ulcer. Blood tests also revealed that he had been receiving a sedative. The traffickers had given him a little milk every morning, and apparently they had laced it with a drug to make the refugees more manageable. This explains why he had felt so unwell during the trip.

Like the thousands of other migrants and refugees coming through Slovakia from the south and east, George soon found himself in a refugee camp. Unlike the vast majority, however, he did not slip away quietly and illegally cross the border into Austria and the West. Instead, he applied for asylum as a victim of religious and ethnic persecution, arguing that he would face a real threat of violence if he returned to Nigeria. Nevertheless, the migration authorities refused his application, giving as their reason that George and his family could have simply moved to another part of Nigeria to escape persecution. They made this statement even though they really did not know what conditions were like in Nigeria. They also said that they would not send him back to Nigeria. So, in effect, they were saying that he could not stay in Slovakia, he could not return to Nigeria, and he also could not go to any other country! He appealed this decision to the Supreme Court, but his former lawyer filed the paperwork two days after the deadline, and it was therefore rejected. Because the decision was based on a technicality, George filed a second appeal in the hope that the court would consider his case on its merits. Month after month dragged on with no news of the outcome.

While George was in the midst of this bureaucratic nightmare, he stayed at a refugee camp about two hours from Bratislava, and he was free to come and go. One day in July he was organizing materials in the library and found a copy of the English-language newspaper published in Bratislava, which contained an advertisement for the English-speaking Christian worship service in Bratislava sponsored by the ELCA. He was very excited about this and the next Sunday got up at four in the morning to take a bus to Bratislava and attend the service. Unfortunately, he could not find the church that first time, but the next Sunday he was there. The pastor, Paul Hanson, and his wife, Kay, invited George to stay with them on the weekends so he would not have to get up so early on Sundays.

George came into our lives when my wife and I returned to Slovakia from a trip home to the United States to visit our families. My wife works with Paul Hanson as his associate pastor in the English-speaking congregation in Bratislava, and I am a teacher at the Lutheran seminary in the same city. We work in Slovakia under call from the Division for Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. When we returned that September, we invited George to stay in our apartment on weekends since we had an extra room that he could claim as his own. In December, after he had been in the refugee camp for 11 months, we were able to get permission for him to stay with us continuously. We have tried to be advocates

for him and help him as we can.

Seeing him at such close range, we have learned that he is a young man of deep faith. He is extremely personable and has many friends in Bratislava, especially among the international students. He is not at all embarrassed to share his faith and to invite people to church. He was instrumental in starting a fellowship for Christian international students, which meets in our home on Saturday evenings. George also has many Slovak friends and has been volunteering at the library at the seminary, where he has met and befriended many students. Most of the time, he is very hopeful and cheerful despite what he has gone through. He is making efforts to find his brother, sister, and mother, but so far he has not been successful. He grieves for his father, whom he revered, and for his sister, but in some ways it is harder with his mother, sister and brother since he does not know what has become of them or even whether they are dead or alive.

Of course, George sometimes gets discouraged. In January and February of 2004, the anniversary of his sister's murder and of his horrendous journey when he lost the rest of his family, he agonized over why God brought him to Slovakia. For months there had been no progress in his asylum process and his life seemed to be going nowhere. Then, one night, he had a dream. He was in a classroom, but there were no other pupils in the classroom with him. When the teacher walked in, it was his father. His father said to him, "George, remember what I taught you." He had this same dream three nights in a row. On the third day he suddenly realized what this dream meant. His father had done ministry with the poor. The people in the refugee camps in Slovakia were poor and in need of many things. As one who had lived in those camps and understood what it means to be a refugee, he felt a call to reach out to these people.

Even before he told us about his intentions, he put his plan into action. He used what little pocket money he had to buy milk and some other groceries, brought them to the organization that takes care of the refugees and asked them to bring them to the refugees in one of the camps. When he told them his plans to start a ministry with the refugees, they told him it could not be done. When he told his friends at the seminary about his plans, they also told him it could not be done. Slovaks have very little experience with doing charity work and, in any case, their experience is that the obstacles are so great that such efforts are futile; their assumption is that it is up to the government to take care of such things. George refused to be influenced by their skepticism. He solicited contributions from businesses, schools, churches, and other organizations. Within a few months he had gathered and shipped nine vans full of used clothing, school supplies, and toys to the camps. His project is called "God's Care" and is an official ministry of "Diakonia," the social service arm of the church. Not only has this project helped hundreds of refugees, but it has shown Slovaks that something like this is indeed possible—and with resources from within Slovakia. Many young people, including students at the seminary, have become very involved in this project, gaining valuable experience and learning from George's example how to mobilize resources in order to meet a pressing need in society. He is a young man, only 18, without a passport, not allowed to hold a job or attend public university. He is without status, and yet he has become a leader in Slovakia and an inspiration and example for many people, especially young people. We are very proud of him!

This fall George began taking classes at City University, a private American institution with a branch in Slovakia. Three sponsors from the United States paid

for the tuition so that he could attend. After two years away from his studies, he is very excited about being back in school. When he doesn't get the top grade on his latest exam, he studies harder for the next one. In his first semester, he earned As in all three of his classes.

After a year and a half, George finally heard from the Slovak court. The authorities will not give him asylum in Slovakia. We expected this denial; Slovakia only accepted two refugees of the 9,000 that applied last year. Despite this discouraging news, he is continuing his efforts. He has appealed to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to see if he can be reassigned to a new country, and we are hoping he can be placed in the U.S. Refugee Program. He has a sponsor in Chicago who has filed with the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) on his behalf. However, between UNHCR sending him and LIRS receiving him stands the U.S. Agency for Homeland Security. The United States has severely restricted the number of refugees who can enter the country, but we hope and pray that the process will go well for George. In the meantime, he has "tolerated stay" status in Slovakia, which means that he can live and work here, although he still has no legal status or passport.

We will continue to stand with George and be his family as we pray for his real family—his mother Mary Evans, his brother Victor, and his sister Christiana. We eagerly hope for the day when he can be reunited with them. In the meantime, George is a great gift to us and great blessing to many people in Slovakia.

Jonathan Sorum and his spouse, Ann Sorum, work in Bratislava, Slovakia, under call from the Division for Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Their permanent home is in Moorhead, Minnesota.

You may view photographs of George Evans' project, God's Care, online at <www.diakonis.sk>. ("Obdarovane deti" are refugee children.) The article entitled "Príbeh Georga Evansa" features photographs of George, the Sorums, and the God's Care team.

SOME THOUGHTS I HAVE IN MIND WHEN I AM PROFESSING

by James Farrell

I had a vocation once, but I lost it. Growing up Catholic, a vocation meant only one thing: boys could become priests, and girls could become nuns. When we prayed for vocations, this is what we had in mind. And so did our parents and grandparents. My Grandmother Farrell didn't like my parents calling me "Jim," because she feared that a nickname would interfere with my career as a cardinal of the church. Whoever heard of "Jim Cardinal Farrell?" For a long while, I was, in fact, attracted to the priesthood. But I was also attracted to politics. For a young Catholic, the 1960 election was heavenly, and—even after the Kennedy assassination—politics seemed like a promising profession for a person of my faith. When I applied for admission to Loyola University in 1967, therefore, I said that I wanted to study political science because I wanted to be president of the United States. (I still thought that you had to know something to be president.) Having lost my vocation, I was looking for another, and I guess I still am.

If vocation is a call from God, I must say that God didn't call me person-to-person. I never heard a voice from heaven, or sizzled in a bolt of lightning. I came to history and American studies and St. Olaf College by accident—or by serendipity, which is the term I prefer. Because Loyola needed enough men to match the number of women at its Rome Center, I spent my sophomore year in a junior-year-abroad program. I hitchhiked a lot, and people asked me questions about America that I couldn't answer. Curious, I turned to American history for answers. I also got shut out of all the political science classes when I came back to Chicago, because, even though I had been enrolled in a Loyola program, they made me register dead-last as a transfer student. To kill time, and to find an occupation that might occupy me until I was old enough to become president, I enrolled in education courses. And so I blundered into the bully pulpit of the classroom.

I went to graduate school in history with the same purposeless passion. My wife Barb was in graduate school in psychology, and I needed something to do to keep myself busy while she was studying. History was a good choice, because every day there's more of it to study. Eventually—very eventually—I received a degree in American culture, a combination of history, literature, art, and music. By the time I graduated, I was already at St. Olaf, hired as an interdepartmental clone to replace faculty members on leave—in history, American studies, art history, and education. I had never heard of St. Olaf when I applied here, but it has become an organic part of my life and vocation. Maybe serendipity is just another name for providence.

For me, teaching at St. Olaf has been a chance to answer the questions that life has posed for me. I want to be able to explain to myself why we act like Americans. I want to explore the politics of American government and the politics of everyday life. I want to contemplate the goodness of the so-called

“good life.” I want to see why I act the way I do, and how I might act better. I want to practice and propagate traditions of thoughtfulness, which should be the primary product of colleges. Fortunately for me, St. Olaf is an institution that also engages these issues, and my students are people curious about the same kinds of questions.

Teaching is a peculiar form of work, because it makes a convocation out of our vocations. At St. Olaf, my vocation intersects with those of my friends and colleagues, with administration and staff, and—most importantly—with students. In the classroom, my vocation as a professor offers provocations to students following their own vocational paths. The main elements of college classes are reading, writing, and speaking, each of which brings us into conversation with people, past and present, who help us see why we act the way we do. Each of the disciplines of the college is designed to help us answer the main question of a college education: “What does it mean to be human in a particular time and place in the universe?” History suggests that we act the way we do because dead people told us to. Dead people established the ideas and institutions—even the language—that we use. Reading history, then, is a way of having conversations with dead people, a way of asking them what they had in mind, and what we have in our minds. Sometimes, especially in American history, we learn directly why we think the way we do; in other cases, history gives us “perspective by incongruity” on our own lives by showing us fully human beings who act on different assumptions altogether.

I am a professor of history, but I don't think that professing a discipline, by itself, constitutes a vocation. When my friends introduce me to other people, they often say that I teach history. This is true, but I prefer to think that I teach *students*, who are a peculiar form of human being. When I'm teaching, I try to be mindful of the personhood of these young people. For me, that sense of personalism helps me keep my work in perspective. History in the abstract may be a profession, but history in the persons of my students is a more profound and interesting matter. When the stories of the past become intertwined with the stories that students bring to my classes, then history really happens.

At a place like St. Olaf, professors like me notice that their students learn more than we teach—and that much of that learning is unrelated to our classrooms. First-year students, especially, report that they learn a tremendous amount about living on their own just by sharing a room with a person who, until September, was a total stranger. They learn about different human purposes and work habits, and varying definitions of diet and cleanliness. They experience the joys and sorrows of time management, money management, and stress management. They feel the pangs of doubt and the consolations of religion. They reap the hard-earned benefits of a residential college.

For the most part, it's my vocation to let students learn these lessons on their own. But when, in their class journals or in office hours, students ask questions about these issues as well as other issues of human belief and behavior, it's my job to tell them my partial truths. In many ways, I think that we profess not just by teaching but by example. In a wonderful essay called “Some Thoughts I Have in Mind When I Teach,” Wendell Berry contends

that “the best relationships of teacher and student are those that turn into friendships. In friendship the education machine is entirely circumvented and removed from consideration, and the two minds can meet freely and fully. The student comes to know the teacher, which in my opinion is a thousand times better than knowing what the teacher knows. The teacher ceases to function merely as a preceptor and becomes an example—an example of something, good or bad, that his [or her] life has proved to be possible.”¹

For me, this means that part of my vocation is to offer who I am as well as what I know to my students. When students ask—and generally *only* when they ask—I can offer my story as one way of making sense and making meaning in the world. White, male, heterosexual, married, middle-aged, middle-class, suburban, Catholic, confused, critical, contradictory—I am a possibility for my students, just as historical figures are also models for our own thinking and action. When we are studying the politics of housework in American studies, it’s useful for students to know how Barb and I have worked this out. When I’m teaching environmental history, it’s okay for them to ask why I drive a distance to work. Along with their parents and pastors, their friends and relations, I am exemplary—and not always positively. Indeed, it’s important (and both humbling and consoling) to know that, in some ways, it’s a good thing for me to be a bad example for students. I am an example, good *and* bad, of some possibilities in American life.



Part of my professing happens in classrooms, but some of it happens in dorm rooms and living rooms and cars. That’s because, like most faculty, I’m a writer. In America, the culture of college usually includes an injunction to professors to “publish or perish.” Professors pass on knowledge in the classroom, but they’re also supposed to shape knowledge in books and articles presented to their academic peers. The problem with this academic publishing is that, too often, it’s “merely academic,” meaning that no one really cares about our abstruse theories and stories. In my own life, I’ve tried to present my scholarship in other ways to larger audiences: in Chautauqua presentations as a 19th-century Minnesota pioneer; in lecture series at places like Holden Village and Bjorklunden; at Elderhostels; and, more recently, in “Dr. America” commentaries on WCAL.

Most of the time, writing is a way of discovering what I think. At this point, for example, which is a few pages into a first draft of this essay, I’m still not sure where I’m going. Writing is, for me, a form of play, a way of “serendipping” between words and my experience to see if I can make some sense of them. Writing is where I don’t come out to play; I go in to play. In an essay, especially in an exploratory essay, play is what we pay to see. The word “essay” means “to try out,” and an essay is where we try out different voices and ideas. Sometimes, we try on other people’s ideas, dressing in what

¹Wendell Berry, “Some Thoughts I Have in Mind When I Teach,” *Writers as Teachers, Teachers as Writers*, ed. Jonathan Baumbach (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 15-25.

we might call intellectual drag.

Sometimes, however, writing is just a drag. Writing a book is a pain in the butt, and in the lower back, and the wrists and forearms. It's carpal-tunnel syndrome, and it's tunneling to the brain. It's the extra-strength headache, the one that sneers at Tylenol and Excedrin. I sit in front of my computer monitor, and I'm sure that it is monitoring me. "Vegetative state," it bleeps back to the mother ship. The cursor blinks like a demented lighthouse, while another idea crashes into the writer's block. My fingers touch the keyboard, but they are not in touch with my brain. I am not writing; I am writhing.

Then, when I least expect it, the writing amuses itself with my mind, taking possession of me. I find that the writing wires my brain for double tasking. I can be thinking about one thing, and, all of a sudden, a sentence slides sinuously into my synapses. Often, when I'm otherwise occupied in my morning shower, my neurons just keep on composing. I even find that I write when I am asleep. Dreams just before dawn often turn out to contain first drafts of phantom phrases. I seldom need an alarm when I am writing.

At its best, writing is pure play. Play, says my dictionary (playing with my expectations), comes from a root meaning "to take up one's promise or responsibility." But it means "to move lightly, rapidly, or erratically; frisk; flutter." It means "to have fun, amuse oneself." Or "to make love playfully" (foreplay and afterplay, I guess). Or "to perform on a musical instrument." And "to perform on a stage." This means, I guess, that I take up my responsibilities as a writer not by taking myself too seriously, but by amusing myself.

Writing is also, for me, a musical performance. I love the rhythm of a good sentence, the harmonies of a well-constructed paragraph or page. (The word "page," for example, is pasted onto that last sentence as much for the pulse of the alliteration as for any addition of meaning; and this sentence, you'll notice, doesn't flow nearly as nicely as the last one.) I like to play with metaphors and puns and allusions, because they are the bargain basement of writing; you get two meanings for the price of one.

Culturally speaking, writing is a way of recording words, a way of making ideas available for reading and reflection. Writing is a point of connection between one person and another person, the two of them engaged in a dance that neither of them entirely controls. At its best, it is a conversation in which the worlds and words of the author come into contact with the worlds and words of people with the *author*-ity of their own experience, whether or not they ever write it down. Like teaching, writing is a place where vocation becomes convocation. At its best, our books and articles can be both profession of faith, and a calling to both writer and reader.



When I first became a college professor, I didn't think of it as a vocation; I thought of it as a job. In America, most of us are happy to have a job, which is a position for which we get paid. A job is a piece of work. In fact, in the 19th century, the term "job work" meant "piecework." The word "job" comes

from a Middle English word meaning lump, and is related to our word “gob.” In the 18th century, Samuel Johnson defined a job as “petty, piddling work,” and for many Americans, the definition still fits.

A lot of Americans do this petty, piddling work because companies pay us for it. We are part of the “Great Compromise,” in which 20th-century Americans have told employers that “we will perform stupid, dehumanizing work as long as you give us enough compensation to purchase the private compensations of a ‘good life.’” We focus on the extrinsic rewards of work, because the intrinsic rewards are often so paltry. College professing is different. If you’re smart enough to be a college professor (which, frankly, isn’t all that smart) you know that there isn’t much money in it. But there are intrinsic satisfactions that compensate professors like me, and some of the most significant are spiritual and religious.

After a few years of professing, I began to think of it as a career, which, in America, is the upward trajectory of jobs over time. For most Americans, a career is primarily private; it is a person’s advancement within social boundaries, and it often leads to social and geographical mobility and the uprooting of communities. A “career culture” requires ambitious, calculating individualists who want to get ahead—leaving the rest of us, by definition, behind. At a certain point in my careering, I would have left St. Olaf behind for a so-called better offer.

In my time at St. Olaf, I’ve increasingly come to think of my career as a vocation. When I have time to think deeply about my work, which is not as often as I’d like, I think of it as a calling from God to help create the Kingdom of God on earth. Vocation gives us a way of thinking about the cosmic and communitarian aspects of work, and it invites us to think about the gift of creation, the creation of our own gifts, and the ways in which our gifts might be applied to the purposes of the creation. A vocation is a call from God to use God’s gifts for Her glory and for the good of the community, including the poor. A calling can never be purely private, nor can it be purely vocational in the narrow sense of the word. A vocation is God’s call to work in the world, not just at our jobs, but in all of the settings of our lives. If we believe in vocation, we are all at work now, because we are all engaged in thinking about our work in the world. Perhaps, therefore, instead of saying that we are “at work,” we should say that we are “on vocation.”

For me, this idea of vocation is intimidating, because it means that a person must be dedicated to God’s project and not just the projects of American capitalism. The more I think about it, the more I think that God’s main projects are justice and reconciliation. If a job doesn’t have justice in the job description, I sometimes think, then it’s probably not a vocation. If it isn’t religious in the root sense of the word, it’s probably not a vocation. Religion comes from the Latin “religare,” which means “to bind together.” At its root, therefore, religion is a science of connectedness, binding people to God, people to each other, and people to God’s creation. At its root, religion is radical, because it works against the disconnectedness of modern (or postmodern) culture. Sometimes college professing lets us make these connections, helps us to see our responsibilities to God’s creation. But there are many days when I wonder if my work is really radical enough to be a

vocation.

While I've been at St. Olaf, I've also come to think of my work as a profession—and, to some extent, a profession of faith. In America, a profession is generally understood as a service occupation, usually prestigious and often enriching, in which professionals employ their expertise and their judgment to assist people who are considered clients. The ethics of professionalism require professionals to act in the client's interest, even when other options might be easier. Lawyers, doctors, and college professors are among America's professionals.

Beyond this cultural definition of professionalism, I also think of teaching as a profession of faith. At Loyola, I took a course on the Pauline Epistles from a priest who never used the word "God" without appending the parenthetical expression "if there is a God." At first, I thought it odd that a priest should be unsure about the existence of God. But then it occurred to me that, even without rational certainties, he was leading his life *as if* there were a God, a remarkable act of faith in itself. Since then, I've been dubious about dichotomizing faith and works. The way we act *is* our act of faith. Each of us is an example of how faith acts in the world. Increasingly, it seems to me that work is not just how we experience faith but also how we express it. "For the Shaker craftsmen," Thomas Merton once observed, "love of God and love of truth in one's own work came to the same thing, and that work itself was a prayer, a communion with the inmost spiritual reality of things and so with God."



James Thurber once said that it's more important to know some of the questions than all of the answers. In *The Reinvention of Work*, Matthew Fox provides some of the questions we should pose about the spirituality of work.² Here are my favorites:

- Is my work real work or just a job?
- Do I experience joy in my work? Do others experience joy as a result of my work?
- Is my work smaller than my soul? How big is my soul? How big is my work? What can I do to bring the two together?
- How does my work connect to the Great Work of the universe? Is my work actively creating good for others? Who profits [in both senses of the word] from my work?
- How is my work a blessing to generations to come?

²Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* (NY: HarperCollins, 1994), 309-312.

- How does my work affect the environment?
- What do I learn at work?
- What is sacred about the work I do? Which of the classical seven sacraments most characterizes the work that I do?
- If I were to leave my work today, what difference would it make to my spiritual growth? To the spiritual development of my colleagues at work? To the spiritual development of my family and friends?
- What am I doing to reinvent the profession in which I work?

These are tough questions, the midterm self-examination in the course of life. At this point in my life, I expect I would still flunk. But having lost one vocation and gained another, having abandoned a life of Holy Orders for a life of disorder and thoughtfulness, I still have time to learn.

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DIALOGUE: A BRIDGE TO UNDERSTANDING

Senior Chapel Talk, February 19, 2004

by *Carolina Chiesa*

I am here today to share with everyone in this room something that I have learned gradually over my time here at Augsburg College. Obviously I am a senior, getting ready to be married, start a job, and jump out into the world in a matter of three months. Looking back over my four years here, I have so many people to thank—people that challenged, pushed, frustrated, and encouraged me, helping me to become the person that is standing in front of you today. These people may not even know who they are, but I will ever remember and hold them in my heart. They helped me understand the concept that I want to share with everyone here today.

It all started with my roommate and very good friend Maja Lisa. She is Catholic, and, as I always let people know, she has been the catalyst for pushing me and teaching me about what I believe. I grew up Lutheran. I see myself as Lutheran. I even work in a Lutheran church, teaching preschoolers the basics of what it means to be Lutheran. I grew up with Lutheran parents, and I chose a Lutheran college. Despite all this, many of the people I hold as dear friends and classmates are not Lutheran. This situation never posed a conflict for me. I didn't even think about it until I went to church with Maja Lisa. To my astonishment, I left the church crying; I was so frustrated. I felt like I didn't belong there, and I couldn't understand why two denominations so close to each other in history could be so different. This experience, as well as others, led to some interesting conversations with Maja Lisa. I grilled her about her beliefs. I struggled to understand why anyone would believe what she believed, and I tried desperately to explain what I believed to her. These discussions were

not one-time occurrences. They happened continually over our four-year friendship.

I think the most important lesson I learned at Augsburg has nothing to do with what I learned about vocation and nothing to do with my major, but everything to do with how to be an authentic person in this troubling, confusing world. I have come to realize the importance of dialogue and the implications of how we approach it.

When I say dialogue I do not mean just talking to each other. I mean actively engaging each other, guiding each other, and treating each other with respect. This idea is simple and obvious ... right? Well, I am here to say that it is not that easy, and we will all fall short, especially in respecting each other. Let me give an example, and let's stay with the topic of religion because I think that is where dialogue gets tough.

One can look at the difference between Catholics and Lutherans over the issue of "works" through the centuries. Catholics view works as important for salvation; Lutherans don't. Both have valid reasons for the beliefs they hold, but there is no way that a Catholic can agree with the Lutheran belief and still hold the Catholic view to be true, and vice versa. A dialogue between a Lutheran and a Catholic would not be effective if the Lutheran reacted to the Catholic with the question, "How can you believe in doing good works to achieve salvation when the Bible says we are saved by grace alone?" A question better-suited to encourage dialogue might be, "How do you understand good works in terms of one's relationship with God?" Notice how the first question starts with "How can you?" and the

second question starts with, “How do you?” This difference in phrasing is very significant. The first question is accusatory. It creates walls in discussion and closes off the lines of communication. It reveals the questioner’s underlying desire to disprove something or discount someone’s beliefs. The second question is open-ended and non-judgmental. It reflects the intention to understand another’s ideas, not to discredit them.

In this very room there are probably many other such examples of how much people vary in their beliefs and perspectives. So what should we do? Say, “Well, shucks. I guess we are different” and cut our losses? NO! As educated and caring people, we must learn from our differences. If we just ignore our differences, how can we advance our understanding? How can we be in community with each other? How can we really have respect for a person if we do not attempt to understand who that person is? Once again, all of this is easier said than done.

It is crucial to realize that understanding is not the same as agreeing. If our goal is to understand, then when the very tough and debatable questions come up, we naturally respond to the other person’s statements with respect. In other words, the practice of intentional understanding fosters respect for the other person. Respect will transform a debate from one that is about what is right or wrong to one that is about understanding another’s belief. Because of respect, one can understand how a belief can be right or wrong, depending on the rationale of the believer. Only through understanding and the building of respect can one acquire the right to

question another person’s belief in terms of right and wrong. Eventually, one begins to comprehend how someone else

can view their convictions as right, even though those beliefs do not conform to our own. This insight is what needs to be reached through dialogue.

You might think that that this is just a theory that I have, but it is beyond a theory for me. This is something that I have witnessed in my life and in the lives of those around me. Understanding and respect explain why Maja Lisa and I are close friends and why I often stand up for Catholics in a discussion—not because I agree, but because there is someone I respect very much who is Catholic and who, with good reason, believes what she says one hundred percent.

If we continually foster a lack of understanding for each other, how can we really communicate? How can we really respect each other? Understanding is not always easy. More often than not, I don’t listen well enough to understand and respect a person. But I believe that by clearly and intentionally **choosing** to respect each other, we as a community can be in peace together.

The downfall is that you may not get the same treatment in reverse. But during those times remember all those people in your life who have influenced you and positively affected your life. I believe understanding through dialogue is the way to have that same kind of positive effect on others, even if that means risking that we ourselves might not be respected. If the people we are talking to are not trying to understand who we are and what we believe in, it should serve to remind us of the most important principle of all: **All people deserve respect!**

Now let us all go out to listen and learn from those around us and then teach about ourselves. It should not be the other way around.

Carolina Chiesa is a recent graduate of Augsburg College. She double-majored in music and youth and family ministry with a minor in psychology.

VOCATION

SEARCH FOR VOCATION: THE LIFE-LONG QUEST

by Norma C. Noonan

The search for vocation is an age-old quest that has haunted many generations. All of us wrestle with the quest at some time. The dialogue on vocation at Augsburg in the past two years has offered an opportunity to reflect on vocation beyond the normal attention one might give to this question. In addition, I have had considerable opportunity to focus on this theme as a result of the graduate course that I co-teach, *Spirituality and Leadership in the Workplace*. These two factors have influenced me to write my thoughts on the quest for vocation and its role in the life of the individual.

Vocation means a calling. But, a calling to what? Historically, the term often had a religious meaning—a calling to the church to serve as a priest or minister for life. At times the term is used as a synonym for one's work or occupation. In keeping with the latter definition, it may even signify a skill or craft; for example, vocational schools are institutions where one prepares for a trade. Avocation, a term derived from vocation, refers to what one does with one's spare time—a hobby or a personal interest, such as stamp collecting or skiing.

Vocational calling may manifest in many different forms. It may be a life-long commitment, or it may be a more limited commitment—five, 10, 15, or 20 years. One may have more than one calling in life, but in such instances they are usually sequential rather than simultaneous since a calling suggests a commitment above and beyond that of a job or occupation. We sometimes meet people who torture themselves with worry because they cannot find true satisfaction in their work or lives. Others enjoy everything that they do. For some, the calling is commitment to family. For others it is commitment to the church. For yet others it may be their profession—teaching or social work or medicine or business—or a passionate commitment to art or music. There is no single calling for all. For each of us it is a personal journey and a personal quest.

What motivates people to search for vocation? Various studies suggest that as many as 40 percent of all workers are dissatisfied with their jobs. Many question their work: Is this all there is? Is this all that I can do? Can't I leave a legacy to the world? Often the search for a calling is tied to a spiritual desire to find meaning in one's life, a fundamental need of a thinking person. Such people continually ask themselves how they can lead lives that matter and what they can do to help humankind. For some the answer comes easily, perhaps even in their teen years. For others the

quest is longer and the answers harder to find. Sometimes one must go through a life-changing experience to find the answer.

How does one go about discerning one's vocation? In his book *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer, well-known writer and activist, tells us to wait for life to speak to us. "I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about," he says (4). While this is excellent advice, the task is not always as easy as it sounds. Not everyone experiences the "speaking" in the same way. For some, there is only silence. Or perhaps some people hear too many voices. Can those who hear nothing expedite their journey? Can those who are drawn in different directions by several voices find, what is for them, the right way? Ultimately, people who seek their calling are driven to try different paths to see what works and to discover for themselves what is possible.

Sometimes this journey of discernment may seem endless. It can be frustrating if one feels "called" to one vocation after another and comes up empty in terms of finding meaning and fulfillment. In my present work as the director of the Center for Leadership Studies, I meet numerous people who are searching for something more in their lives and careers. Some are married; others are single or divorced. Most are not unhappy, but they are searching for greater meaning in their lives, especially their professional lives. They earn a good living but do not find satisfaction in their work. A few even quit their jobs and take part-time or independent work supplemented by volunteer activity in projects where they think they can make a contribution. Their experiences only strengthen my conviction that the search for a calling arises in large part from the human desire to make a difference in the world.

The search for vocation may not be as simple as sometimes depicted in books on calling. There may not be an "ah-ha" moment that the individual consciously recognizes and internalizes. Realization may occur long after one is already practicing one's calling. Perhaps one wakes up one day and realizes that one's life work is actually the true calling, after years of questioning, seeking, and wondering.

Even when one is practicing and enjoying one's calling, there may be a longing, a further searching for another way of finding meaning in life. The desire for something new and better in our lives seems to be a need we all share. Perhaps the quest for vocation never ends ...

Norma Noonan is a professor of political science at Augsburg College.



CHRISTIAN REFLECTIONS ON VOCATION

Review by Nora Braun

Can a professional career, especially in the business field, have meaning for one's vocation? Can people work for a corporation like Enron and still be true to their vocational calling? These questions deserve thoughtful consideration, and a good starting point for such discussions is the text *Vocation*, one of the quarterly issues of the *Christian Reflection* series on faith and ethics published by the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. The series' vocation issue is a compilation of short articles that not only provides insights into the meaning of vocation but also delves into the tension and complex relationship between personal vocation and the world of work.

Since the students in my Weekend College Management and Information Systems major capstone course had not taken the Search for Meaning courses in the new Augsburg Core Curriculum, we started discussion with the article "The Meaning of Vocation" by A.J. Conyers. The author references the religious and secular misunderstandings of the term vocation and posits that vocation is a call from outside the person—often contrary to the will of the one called—and that it is God's summons given for the sake of community. As our class discussed what it meant to be "called" and to put one's call into action, the discussion progressed quite naturally to the common community of the MIS students—the community within a business organization.

While the *Christian Reflection* vocation issue contains several excellent ruminations on living out one's calling in the world of work, our group chose to focus on two particular articles—"Following Our Vocation in Organizations" by Gordon T. Smith and "The Dilbertization of Work" by Al Hsu. Both of these pieces discuss the match between one's beliefs and calling and the purpose of the organization or institution. When the match is good, we find ourselves completely immersed and satisfied with our work as we feel God's pleasure from our use of His gifts. (As one of the students pointed out, "vocation" is just one letter away from "vacation.") However, as Smith points out in "Following Our Vocation in Organizations," it is important to realize that we are distinct from the community we serve. We stay because we believe in its values and we are convinced that we can make a difference. When this is no longer true, recognizing that our identity, mission, and vocation are different from those of the organization gives us the ability to move on. As Hsu says in "The Dilbertization of Work," "God needs Christians in every field ... but He does not want perpetually frustrated Christians working in what they feel are dead-end jobs."

If we suffer from chronic Dilbert-feelings, this might be an indication to us that God has something better in store for us somewhere else” (75).

Like many of my students discussing these articles, some of us may be unsure what our vocation is meant to be. The relationship of self to an organization changes over time. Reassurance comes from both authors as they acknowledge that young adults first entering careers view working in an organization as an opportunity for learning and self-discovery. Intuitively looking for a match to their self-identity, it is often later—in the 30-something years—when many people find a job that truly matches who they are. Later still, during the transition to “second adulthood,” people tend to change their focus from success to significance. Hsu describes this stage as the time “when we are less interested in accomplishments and more interested in meaning and purpose” (73).

One of my students, after our readings and discussions, made a decision to quit the company she had served for eight years. In her journal she wrote about the anger and frustration of her job, how she hated her work and dreaded getting up in the morning. When she quit, her sense of release gave her a joy she had not felt in quite a while, and as she contemplated her future job search, she reflected on the type of organization she really wanted. Her belief that God intended that she use her skills to benefit others led her from the corporate manufacturing world into the area of health services, where she felt a closer match between her vocation and the organization. She benefited personally because she is now happy to go to work and feels the joy of using her skills where she can make a difference. She finds herself truly living the adage, “Wherever you are, be fully there.”

Clearly, the vocation issue of Baylor’s *Christian Reflection* series served as an excellent catalyst for meaningful discussion for the students in the MIS major capstone course, and it could be useful in other college classrooms as well. The format—a collection of articles rather than a single text—offers flexibility by allowing users to choose their emphasis. In addition, each article has a corresponding study guide and a set of suggested lesson plans. While our group did not use these ancillary materials, some instructors and students might benefit from such resources and structure. All text exists in electronic form and can be downloaded from the Center for Christian Ethics Web site (www.christianethics.ws), making the series a convenient and inexpensive way to help students explore the gift of vocation and its application to everyday work life.

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FAITH AND LEARNING

FAITH AND LEARNING AT AUGSBURG COLLEGE

In the spring of 2002, the Lilly Endowment, Inc., granted Augsburg College a marvelous opportunity to expand the College's commitment to connecting faith and learning. Their grant of \$2 million over a five-year period allowed the College to create ***Exploring Our Gifts***. This program has a particular focus on helping students, faculty, and staff discern their vocations in service to God and the world. The results thus far have been encouraging, with hundreds of students, faculty, and staff benefiting from more than a dozen new programs and academic opportunities, which are described in the project updates that follow.

We are now turning our attention to the future to ensure that this important work and the benefits it provides to the College community continue beyond the life of the grant. One of our dreams is to organize this work and related campus programs under a single banner, clearly signaling our commitment to the Christian faith in how we prepare students for their lives in the world. To this end, the College has begun planning and garnering resources for a new ***Center for Faith and Learning*** that would build upon the spirit, momentum, and accomplishments of Exploring Our Gifts. We hope you will join us in this important work!

EXPLORING OUR GIFTS

PROJECT UPDATES

Theme 1 – Vocation as Life Approach

Vocatio Worship

Since fall of 2002, the Vocatio Worship series has been running once a month. Speakers have come from a wide variety of backgrounds and touched on many different aspects of vocation. Some speakers have led the worshipping community through exercises, while others have shared stories of personal vocation. Students have also been given the opportunity to go further in depth with the chapel speaker over an informal lunch after chapel. The program has been attended by classes, individuals, and guests from off campus.

Orientation and Augsburg Seminar

Students who are new to Augsburg get exposure to vocation in a number of different ways. They hear a presentation on vocation at the new student orientation in the summer. They also devote at least one session of their Augsburg Seminar to reflection on vocation. In addition, parents who accompany their sons or daughters to orientation have several opportunities to hear about *Exploring Our Gifts* and how Augsburg has made vocation the overarching theme that guides its classroom work and service in the world.

Alumni Mentoring

The Alumni Mentoring Program has continued to grow and evolve since the inception of the grant. At one time, it's structure was very loose and informal. Now students, alumni, and employees are assigned to teams that meet regularly to share interests, hopes, and dreams. Sometimes all the teams join together as a large group to hear speakers discuss vocation from their various perspectives. As members of individual teams, participants explore the city together and share bits and pieces from their own lives. The hope is that students will forge relationships that will empower them to move into the next phase of their vocational journey, no matter what that phase may be. Since the inception of the program, 68 students have participated in the program, and each year approximately 28 alumni and 15 faculty or staff members serve as mentors.

Mentoring in Spiritual Practices

Each school year a group of up to 20 students, faculty, and staff members meet monthly to learn about various spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, journal keeping, and Scripture reading. These spiritual disciplines foster the discernment of vocation, which is a continuous quest. Toward the end of the school year group members participate in a weekend silent retreat, based on the ideas of Ignatius of Loyola concerning discernment.

Vocation Quest Retreat

Each fall and winter, 10 to 12 students board a van to get away from campus and study vocation in a relaxed atmosphere. Staff members from Campus Ministry and the Center for Service, Work, and

Learning guide students through various exercises that help them discover their gifts, strengths, and passions. This experience has created the opportunity for some excellent discussions and has helped initiate freshmen and sophomores into the vocation conversation.

Student Vocation Assessments

Vocation assessments are used in the Center for Service, Work, and Learning as a tool toward increasing self-awareness and engaging students with their life purpose/spiritual journey. Over the last two and half years, we have administered and given feedback using several assessment tools: Do what You Are—400, Career Liftoff—100, StrengthsFinder—30, Enneagram—35, and Leadership Report—50. We continue to evaluate the effectiveness of our assessment selections and have found them to be successful as students apply the results to their lives.

Theme 2 — Vocation as a Curricular Focus

Vocation in Augsburg's Curriculum

Augsburg has placed the concept of vocation at the heart of its new curriculum. Entering students take two courses, “Christian Vocation and the Search for Meaning” (I and II), that have a sense of calling as their main organizing principle. In addition, every Augsburg senior must take a Keystone course that includes significant reflection on vocation. Most departments at Augsburg are currently investigating ways to incorporate vocation into their Keystone offerings.

International Exploration

The Center for Global Education's Lilly project explores faith and vocation in a global context, with the goal of infusing all Augsburg study abroad programs with a discernment component. So far, there have been three project initiatives to further this effort: 1) development of an independent study journal for study abroad students to guide them through their faith and vocational journey; 2) creation of a resource guide for faculty members who are leading international seminars to give them tools to explore faith and vocation issues in their courses; and 3) the implementation of nine international seminars that serve as pilot programs for embedding vocation in the study abroad curriculum. In May 2003 an Augsburg professor of education implemented one such seminar in Namibia. In 2004, CGE coordinated three international seminars: an education program to Guatemala, an alternative spring break to Mexico, and a religion course to El Salvador. Two more seminars will take place in 2005 and a final three seminars are scheduled for 2006. The response of students and faculty has been very positive so far and has affirmed the impact of the seminars.

Lilly Scholars

We are in the third year of the Lilly Scholars program. Each year 10 students are selected to meet seven times in a seminar format with facilitators Mark Tranvik, professor of religion, and Rosemary Link, professor of social work. The topics range from a Lutheran understanding of vocation to helping participants determine their sense of calling. Also included are opportunities to discover the resources at Luther Seminary and an in-depth description of Augsburg's dual degree program in social work and theology. All participants receive a \$2,000 scholarship.

Theme 3 — Vocation as Education for Service

Church Leader Development (Camp Stipends)

In the past Augsburg has not had a very strong camp contingency. Through the Church Leader

Development program, we have started to change that fact. We encourage students to spend a summer working at a camp, knowing that many church leaders have had a significant camp experience. We have helped direct students to certain camps, and helped them to explore the opportunities. We also seek to capitalize on the new skills they have acquired working in a camp setting, so the program helps create a cyclical pattern that benefits both the camps and the campus. So far, 14 students have participated in this project.

Lilly Internships

Since spring 2003, 25 Augsburg students have participated in the Lilly Internship Program in which they engaged in 12 weeks of hands-on experience at faith- and service-based organizations combined with a bi-monthly seminar focused on exploration of vocation. A variety of internship sites were chosen to closely match students majors and interests—including, to name a few, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Family and Children’s Services, Fairview Hospital, Central Lutheran Church, Augsburg Fortress Publishing, World Relief, Youth and Family Institute, The Division of Indian Work, Faith Inkubators, MN Advocates, and the Basilica of Saint Mary Social Ministry. Consequently, the Internship Program has served a wide variety of contingencies, such as church youth groups, seniors and the Faith Chest project, children with mental health issues, Native American adolescent males, and refugees and immigrants.

There is no question that students have benefited from the skills and confidence they developed doing meaningful work at the internship sites and that they appreciated learning from the internship supervisors who modeled lives of vocation in the context of work, but they derived just as much benefit from the seminar discussions. Students often shared that the seminar time—which was devoted to discovering their talents and gifts, connecting their faith to career exploration and using their talents and gifts in life and work—was intensely energizing, though “scary” at times. One Lilly intern reflected, “I want my career to be connected with my call, and my call to be in line with my gifts. The internship has changed the way I think about career and work. This was a fabulous opportunity for growth and learning.”

Urban Immersion

The Urban Immersion project is planning its third annual spring break trip to Washington, D.C., which will take place March 19-26, 2005, with student participants coming mainly from Metro-Urban Studies and Sociology, augmented by students from the Honors Program. As in past years, Luther Memorial Church and its Steinbruck Center will host the group in the congregation’s hostel and provide information about “N Street,” a comprehensive program and residence for homeless women and families. In addition, the group will spend a day with faith-based Manna Community Development Corporation, which builds affordable housing throughout the District, as well as Marshall Heights Community Development Organization, which operates in Ward 7/Anacostia. Students will also have the opportunity to shadow a federal employee and visit the office of Augsburg alumnus Congressman Martin Sabo. Also, the group will be hosted on two evenings by Augsburg alumni Margaret and Donald Mattison and two young couples who are engaged in community change/revitalization vocations and are supported by their involvement in the Church of the Savior in D.C. Following a visit to the Holocaust Museum, the students will take advantage of being in D.C. to explore their own interests prior to returning.

So far, 24 students have explored vocation in the city through the Urban Immersion project, and we hope for another 12 students for the upcoming trip.

Summer Vocation Institute

This program has continued to evolve. In June 2004, 18 high school youth came to campus to explore their gifts, the God who created them, and the world around them. This exceptional group

questioned themselves and the people around them. In 2005, we plan to augment the academic component of the program. The youth will learn about vocation and write a paper about what they have learned. In return, Augsburg College will offer these students a scholarship to continue their study at Augsburg, if they so choose. Registration is open now; please contact Ross Murray at 612-330-1151 or <murray@augsborg.edu> for more information.

Theme 4 – Developing Vocational Awareness in Faculty, Staff, and Students

New Employee Orientation

This project welcomes new employees to the College by offering the opportunity to participate in a mentoring team. The composition of the teams is as follows: four new employees (a mixture of faculty and staff from differing departments) and two current Augsburg employees (typically one staff member and one faculty member). The goals of this project are three-fold—to promote better understanding of and broader engagement in the institutional mission and culture, to develop familiarity with programs and resources available to support the employees' work, and to cultivate mutual appreciation for the work of faculty and staff. Mentoring teams meet three to four times per semester for group activities or for discussion of topics such as the College vision document, Lutheran higher education, and the concept of vocation.

The project benefits new employees because it provides a ready-made cohort for social support and because it helps them acclimate to Augsburg's environment and culture. Current employees also benefit because the mentorship experience helps them build connections with colleagues they might not otherwise have known.

The faculty/staff mentoring project is now in its third year. So far, 154 new employees have participated, and though the success of the experience varied between groups, many new employees appreciated the welcoming spirit and the opportunity to learn about Augsburg.

Professional Development on Vocation

Ron Petrich, an assistant professor of education at Augsburg, continues to offer popular retreats centered on vocation. Using a style that invites personal reflection, Ron nurtures faculty and staff in their understanding of their sense of calling and challenges them to reach beyond conventional categories in their exploration of vocation. In 2005-06, religion professors Mark Tranvik and Phil Quanbeck will lead 20 Augsburg faculty in a seminar on a theological understanding of vocation that will culminate in the trip to Germany and the Martin Luther sites in May of 2006.

Forums

Exploring Our Gifts has sponsored several campus-wide events involving well-known speakers. Visitors who have come to Augsburg to address issues around vocation have included authors like Sharon Parks, Parker Palmer, and Lee Hardy. In addition, Exploring Our Gifts is now initiating a series of luncheons featuring faculty and staff presentations on their own understanding of what it means to be called and what this calling means for work, family life, and civic responsibility.