

## *Institutional Calling and Soul In and Of the World*

*John P. Schuster  
Author of "Answering Your Call"*

I had the great privilege of facilitating a retreat on institutional vocation for St. Norbert College this summer. It was a joy to be part of this experience.

After years of helping individuals with their personal vocations and callings in the world, leaders in the Program of Faith, Learning and Vocation (FLV) sensed that the world was calling St. Norbert College as a whole into its place in history. Carl Jung has a great phrase about calling—"the soul for the most part is outside the body." A strange and mysterious phrase that somehow connects with our need to live our calling in the world, outside of ourselves. We have been trained to think of soul as contained within us instead of that which is both within us and is found in the deep interactions with others and the world.

Frederick Buechner describes vocation as the place where your gladness and the world's hunger connect. The inner and the outer meet. The St. Norbert team knew enough about this central truth to know that institutional vocation would raise questions like:

"Where in the world is the soul of St. Norbert and how can we connect to that institutional calling in a meaningful and historically authentic way?"

"What do the times demand of us, what does our place in Green Bay-De Pere demand of us?"

"How can we be an authentic institution in which and to which individuals can connect and do their best work?"

Through input and dialogue, retreat participants worked at constructing what an institutional calling might look like. Two highlights stand out.

One: Rediscovering St. Norbert as a called saint with a real set of gifts. Going over the St. Norbert history was fascinating—to find his holy intensity, his work in mediating, his breaking the rules and making his own, and the commitment to sta-

bility and place were all outstanding inputs.

And two: Norbertine hospitality. Just what does it mean to be a Catholic, liberal arts college rooted in a community that deeply values hospitality?

An institutional vocation is tied to its mission, of course, but it is more. A mission is choosing a purpose in the world. A calling is somehow surrendering to both that purpose and to the unknown path on which that purpose will take you. It is more a leap of faith than it is a deliberation upon the facts and then a choice.

We left the retreat with no pat answers, but with a profound sense of what's possible for St. Norbert, a great appreciation of each other and of all the staff, faculty and students that make up this college community. And we left with an ongoing challenge to live the question of what the institutional vocation is for a Catholic Norbertine college in De Pere, Wisconsin facing a modern culture that can push us away from calling and into shallower measures of success. The retreat is a counter to this culture, that pursues the depth of what it means to be a human in a time when the world needs all humans to step up.

A poem from Christopher Fry talks about why institutional and personal vocation is so important:

Dark and cold we may be, but this is no winter  
now.

The frozen misery of centuries breaks, cracks,  
begins to move.

Thunder is the thunder of the floes, the thaw,  
the flood, the upstart spring.

Thank God we are alive when evil rises up to  
meet us everywhere,  
never to leave us until we take the longest  
stride of soul Man ever took.

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As this poem describes, though we may be in a psychological winter, the possibility for the human family to get unfrozen from its past miseries may truly be upon us.

We won't find our institutional vocation by finding the technical steps to stop global warming or even to create peace instead of war, both of them

great work. What we need to do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is soul work, calling work, and out of our stride into our deepest humanity, solutions for all of life's ills emerge. Vocation exploration helps us think at a level above the one that that created the ills. Soul work does this, collective and individual, deeply personal and deep within, far into the collective community and far outside.



*Called as Community*  
*Julie Massey, Director*  
*Faith, Learning and Vocation*  
 &  
*Campus Ministry*

The Program of Faith, Learning & Vocation has existed at St. Norbert College since the early days of 2001. In the beginning years of our program, as we sought to introduce ideas, language, and questions connected to vocation, we began with the individual. What does it mean to understand oneself as called? And who, or what, is calling? What are my gifts and passions, and how can I share them in response to the needs of the world? What does vocation mean in terms of my area of study, my job, my relationships, and my involvement with local communities? While leading outward, to the ways one might offer something meaningful in the world, such questions were oriented inward.

And yet...almost despite ourselves we who work in Faith, Learning & Vocation found that questions of personal vocation seemed to naturally lead to questions of a common calling, or institutional vocation. In our summer retreats for faculty and staff conversations began to surface about the nature of the college's vocation, and whether or not we were living up to it as best we could. In our year-long vocation study groups for faculty or staff cohorts such musings regularly flowed into the conversation. We know the college proclaims its unique identity as the only higher educational institution in the world that holds all three of our founding traditions – Catholic, liberal arts, and Norbertine. What do these traditions mean as we seek to understand what we currently are and what our institution is called to become?

You may find it comforting or discomfoting to

learn that the small staff of the Program of Faith, Learning & Vocation is quite certain we do not hold the answers to such questions. However, we do feel an obligation to lend support to our wider institutional conversation on these themes. To that end, in the current era of our program we are working on three new efforts. First, we have developed a new version of our summer Retreat-Seminar for faculty and staff. In this experience, colleagues who have already developed an understanding of personal vocation are invited to reflect together on the college's common vocation. We offered Retreat-Seminar 2 for the first time this past June, and are considering offering it again in summer 2008. Please let us know if you would be interested in participating. Secondly, we are hosting a retreat for the Board of Trustees this October. The Board has participated in a number of retreats in recent years; this will be the second time FLV has sponsored the experience. Having offered a retreat on *The Vocation of the Trustee* in 2004, we will now follow-up with a retreat on *The Vocation of the College*. Finally, we are in the early stages of planning to host a conference for partner schools in the Lilly initiative to consider together questions of institutional vocation. We expect that conference to be offered in the 2008 – 2009 academic year.

It is an exciting year for us, as we continue the good work we have been doing for years, and branch out in some exciting new directions. We hope the year will be exciting and fruitful for you as well!

Fall 2007 FLV Book Discussion  
 Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*  
 Paul Wadell  
 Professor of Religious Studies



The book selected for the fall faculty & staff book discussion is the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, a book that has sold more copies than any other literary work in Brazil.

*The Alchemist* tells the story of Santiago, a shepherd boy who discovers, "It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting." *The Alchemist* chronicles Santiago's pursuit of his dream and how his quest, both perilous and promising, changes his life. Early in his journey Santiago meets an old man named Melchizedek, who presents himself as the "King of Salem". Melchizedek tells Santiago that the most important task in a person's life is to discover their "Personal Legend," which is one's reason for being and the secret to their happiness.

And so in search of his "Personal Legend," Santiago leaves his home in Spain for Africa. Having been told in a dream that he will find his treasure buried near the Pyramids of Egypt, Santiago begins his journey across the desert. Along the way he is robbed, betrayed, beaten, and threatened with death; but also falls in love, meets strangers who befriend him, shows remarkable courage, grows in wisdom, and learns what it means to persevere for the sake of his calling. Early in the book Coelho writes that the "world's greatest lie" is to convince us that "at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate." Because of his belief in his dream and his mission, Santiago refuses to succumb to the lie.

*The Alchemist* is rich in themes that are relevant to our ongoing conversation on vocation. Through the story of Santiago, Coelho explores how important it is to want something with all one's heart. He reflects on the cost of "buried desires," and how fear of risk and change can sabotage any calling or convince us that pursuing our "Personal Legend" is foolish. He reminds us of the importance of delight and enthusiasm for sustaining our calls, but also makes it clear that the closer we come to our life's dream, the more we will be tested.

Please join us on Tuesday, November 6 for the fall faculty & staff book discussion of *The Alchemist*. Discussions will be held at 12 Noon and 3:30 PM in the first floor conference room of the Kress Inn. To receive your copy of *The Alchemist* or if you have your own copy of the book and would like to attend, please register at <http://www.snc.edu/vocation/development/bookdiscussion/registration.html> or contact Debi Nejedlo at x3155 or [debi.nejedlo@snc.edu](mailto:debi.nejedlo@snc.edu)

If you have a suggestion for a future book discussion selection, please contact Paul Wadell at [paul.wadell@snc.edu](mailto:paul.wadell@snc.edu) or at 403-3084.



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## Grant Money Available

The program of Faith, Learning, and Vocation provides financial support to members of the institution who wish to deepen their vocation-related efforts and learning.

- Vocation exploration grants provide conference funding to colleagues seeking to deepen their understanding of vocation as it relates to their work at the college. Monies are available for travel costs and conference fees.

- Vocation initiative grants are available to faculty or staff who have completed the Study Group on Vocation and need support for the execution of their implementation plans.

Applications for Vocation Initiative and Vocation Exploration grants are available on line. Please see our website at <http://www.snc.edu/vocation/development/grants/> Applications are accepted at any time.

# LOOK WHAT WE'RE UP TO!

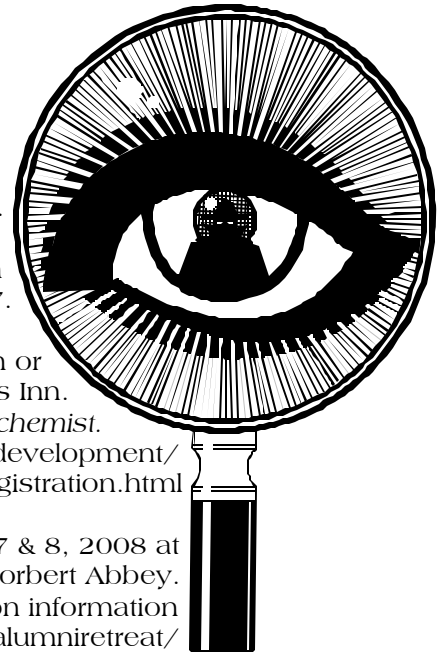
Ministry Intern formation retreat September 21—22, 2007.

FLV will sponsor a Trustee Retreat on Vocation October 10, 2007.

Fall Book discussion—Tuesday November 6 at either 12 Noon or 3:30 PM in the first floor conference room of the Kress Inn.

The selection is Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. Please register at <http://www.snc.edu/vocation/development/bookdiscussion/registration.html>

Alumni Retreat on Vocation — March 7 & 8, 2008 at The Norbertine Center for Spirituality, St. Norbert Abbey. Please watch our website for registration information <http://www.snc.edu/vocation/alumniretreat/>



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