



# Vocation Connections

## Vocation:

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Frederick Buechner

## The Call Goes On: Discipleship and Aging

The language of vocation confirms that at no time in our lives are we exempt from responsibility for others. Our children may be raised and we may have retired from our jobs long ago, but we never stop being called to share in the creative and redemptive activity of God through lives of thoughtful and faithful discipleship. As we grow older, a common temptation is to narrow our circle of concern, to be more selective in the neighbors we choose to love and perhaps, in our insecurity and fear, to be more mindful of our needs than we ought. But to see aging through the lens of vocation reminds us that the elderly, even as their physical and mental abilities diminish and their energy lags, are still called to imitate Christ by the witness of their lives. Calling rescues us from being mere victims to the losses, sorrows and occasionally painful humiliations of aging by alerting us to all the ways we are still, in religion professor Douglas Schuurman's wonderful phrase, "providentially situated" to do good.

What might this mean for the elderly? How can a theology of vocation change our estimation of what those years are about? A pivotal witness that elderly persons can offer is to remind us that aging and death are not the worst things that can happen to us. The worst thing is not to grow old but to live a life bereft of meaning, goodness and love, a life characterized by coldness, self-centeredness and bitterness. A good life is not one devoted to postponing the effects of aging as long as we possibly can, but one spent seeking, praising and loving God.

~ *Dr. Paul Wadell*

An excerpt from *Christian Century* magazine April 14, 2011. Find the complete article at <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-03/call-goes>

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**Editor's Note:** New name? New look? You may be noticing things seem to have changed with Faith, Learning & Vocation's occasional newsletter. Indeed, we're changing our focus, and we hope the change will serve you well. While we will continue to include information about program offerings that may interest faculty and staff, we plan to offer more nourishment for your ongoing vocation journey – articles, profiles, wise words, resources that can help you explore further. We welcome both your feedback and your submission of vocation wisdom you'd like to share! Peace, Julie Massey

## Vocation Profile: *Christine Brown '93*



When I was growing up, one of my mentors was my cousin, Sr. Mary Jo Donaldson. Sr. Mary Jo taught me the importance of service to God and to others and ignited in me a passion for social justice. She was involved in missionary

work in Zimbabwe, and made a real difference in the lives of so many people. When I arrived at St. Norbert College, this passion grew with the help of my professors and my involvement in student organizations. By the time I graduated from St. Norbert College with a BS in Global Peace and Justice Studies, I had already spent a summer in South Africa conducting conflict resolution workshops, organized an alternative Spring Break trip to a repopulated community in El Salvador, and co-directed an international youth exchange camp for the Lion's Club.

When I left SNC, I moved to the Washington, DC area and later to New England where I obtained a MS in Organizational Development and Leadership. For the first fifteen years of my career, I worked for a variety of non-profit organizations in leadership positions on the international, state and local level. I was very proud of my accomplishments and was always driven by the fact that I was helping to create change and make a difference. Along the way, I also got married and started a family. In 2005, when our second son was born, he was diagnosed at birth with a rare genetic disorder called PKU. Then, our third son was also born with PKU in 2007. My life-long career goal to make a difference in the lives of people around me suddenly became very personal.

People with PKU cannot process one of the amino acids that makes up protein called phenylalanine, or phe. Left untreated, PKU causes severe mental retardation. Luckily, PKU can be treated with a very restricted diet that consists of a medical formula that must be consumed every day and specially modified low-protein food. My sons cannot eat things such as meat, fish, soy, milk, cheese, nuts, chocolate, eggs, flour, etc. In

addition, their medical foods and formula are very expensive, and many insurance companies do not provide coverage for them. While some states, such as Wisconsin, provide their formula and some of their food to us, families in other states are not so lucky. PKU is rare -- it affects 1 in 14,000 births in the U.S. It doesn't get a lot of attention, we have no celebrity spokesperson, and it gets little funding. I am going to change this -- for my sons and for the 15,000 other people in our country that have PKU.

I am now the Executive Director of the National PKU Alliance. We work to improve the lives of individuals and families associated with PKU through research, support, education and advocacy, while ultimately seeking a cure.

I've always been drawn to the non-profit sector because of contributing to the greater good -- it fuels my passion, gives me energy, and gives my life meaning. My work now at the National PKU Alliance is important to the greater world. While PKU is rare, 1 in 10 Americans actually have a rare disease. My story is out there with different families and different diseases hundreds and thousands of times. A cure for PKU can advance research and cures for other rare metabolic diseases. Some families are not as lucky as mine. Their kids have a rare disease that is not currently treatable. By raising funds for promising PKU research, the National PKU Alliance has the opportunity to literally change the history of this disorder.

I live out my faith and my values every day in my work. When our children were born with PKU, my saving grace was knowing that because of this disease, God would give them a special talent or a special gift to share with others, and this was how they were going to make their mark in the world. Never in a million years, did I believe that this was in God's plan for me too. As I look back at my career in the non-profit sector, every job I had and every skill I learned now makes sense and serves a greater purpose. My dream has come true -- I am changing the lives and history of this disorder.

# Vocation Reading Group Reflection

The Program of Faith, Learning & Vocation offered a semester long Vocation Reading Group opportunity during the spring semester, 2011. I saw this as an opportunity to gather with colleagues to deepen my understanding of vocation and as an extension of the Retreat Seminar I attended in May 2005 and Retreat Seminar II in May 2007. The group consisted of 1 people from all areas of the campus. We met three times during the semester for one and a half hours each time and culminated in a meal shared during the last session.

We were assigned readings from the anthology *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, which was published in 2005. We started with the introduction and prologue which gave a good overview of the concept of vocation through the centuries, and then read passages from the early Church Fathers and progressed through the centuries to Martin Luther and his contemporaries to more modern thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, John Henry Newman and Thomas Merton. Each discussion brought diverse perspectives from the people in the group and each was very thought provoking. It was rather humbling in some respects, as I realized how little I knew about some of these early thinkers and their philosophies. I saw it as an incentive to increase my knowledge and understanding.

I would highly recommend taking part in future reading groups to further your knowledge and also to meet colleagues from areas of campus that you may not otherwise have contact with. I am so grateful to the Program of Faith, Learning & Vocation for offering these opportunities.

**Karen Mand**

**Mulva Library, Cataloging Management Specialist**

## Vocation Reading Group—Spring 2011

We don't live out our vocations in our heads, in theories or truisms. We live them in context. An important element of our contexts is location. This semester we'll take two distinct looks at location – two authors, two parts of the United States, two types of literature – and consider its impact on how we understand and respond to our vocations.

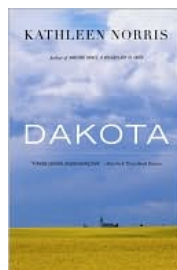
### Early February & March

#### Selection

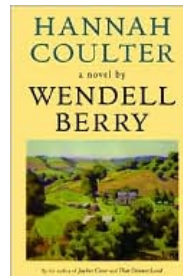
*Dakota: A Spiritual*

*Geography*

by Kathleen Norris



Norris sets the stage for our semester of exploring how vocation connects to location in her insightful and poetic look at the ways in which life in South Dakota is shaped by landscape and seasons. This memoir gives us a view of Norris' spiritual awakening, a process shaped by the family countryside to which she returns.



### April Selection

*Hannah Coulter*

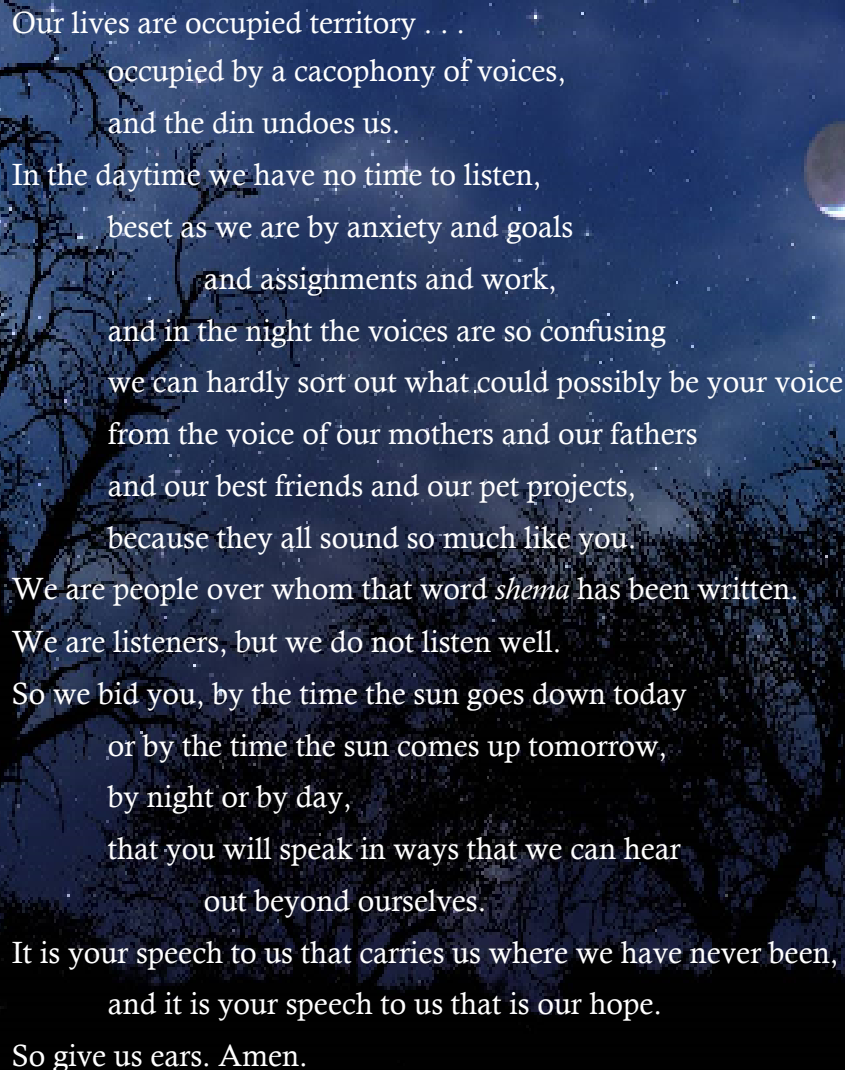
by

Wendell Berry

As one Berry reviewer notes, the key question in a Wendell Berry novel is never Who, What, When, or Why...it is always Where. In this novel, Berry takes us to Port William where we learn of the life of twice-widowed Hannah, her journey from a farming community to the nearby town, and the impact of her deep rural roots on the lives of herself and her family.

**\*\*Register by December 2nd at [snc.edu/vocation](http://snc.edu/vocation)**

## Wisdom for the Journey: *The din undoes us*



Our lives are occupied territory . . .  
occupied by a cacophony of voices,  
and the din undoes us.  
In the daytime we have no time to listen,  
beset as we are by anxiety and goals  
and assignments and work,  
and in the night the voices are so confusing  
we can hardly sort out what could possibly be your voice  
from the voice of our mothers and our fathers  
and our best friends and our pet projects,  
because they all sound so much like you.  
We are people over whom that word *shema* has been written.  
We are listeners, but we do not listen well.  
So we bid you, by the time the sun goes down today  
or by the time the sun comes up tomorrow,  
by night or by day,  
that you will speak in ways that we can hear  
out beyond ourselves.  
It is your speech to us that carries us where we have never been,  
and it is your speech to us that is our hope.  
So give us ears. Amen.

By Walter Brueggemann in *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: The Prayers of Walter Brueggemann*

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### *Vocation Connections*

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