A Season of Discernment
Discerning Vocation
By Dr. Charles Kammer, III
James F. Lincoln Professor of Religious Studies; Dean of Academies of Religion

“One day we will stand before the God of history and we will talk in terms of things that we’ve done. Yes, we will be able to say we built gargantuan bridges to span the seas, we built gigantic buildings to kiss the skies. Yes, we made our submarines to penetrate oceanic depths. Yet it seems to me that I can hear the God of history saying, that was not enough! But I was hungry and ye fed me not. I was naked and ye clothed me not. And consequently, you cannot enter the kingdom of greatness.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Despite the claim that work is a four-letter word, work is an inescapable part of what it means to be human. For those grounded in Biblical traditions, there is the awareness of a creator God who calls persons to the dignity of work as co-creators. But the Genesis account of the Fall also reminds us, if we need a reminder, that human toil is often arduous and futile. Regardless, our survival and development as persons and societies depends upon work. But as persons we want so much more; we want meaningful work, work that is fulfilling, significant. We want our lives to count for something. Through work, both as reflection and engagement, we can find meaning and fulfillment, for meaning is not pre-existent, but is rather something that we discover and create through our work.

But how do we find meaningful work? Christianity has a long history of vocational reflection. Traditional vocational reflection, however, was not about vocation in the modern sense, finding a trade or craft that provides profitable employment. Vocational reflection was about whether a person heard God’s “call” and, for many centuries, this meant being called to a “religious life” (a priest, a nun, a monk). This was truly “holy” work, all other work was secular.

Yet it seems to me that I can hear the God of history saying, that was not enough! But I was hungry and ye fed me not. I was naked and ye clothed me not.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther, however, revolutionized the concept. Luther proclaimed “the priesthood of all believers” declaring that “the holy” does not inhere in a type of work, but is related to the inner attitude of the “worker” and the social effect of the work. All work is good work, meaningful work, if motivated by love for the “other”. A clergyperson concerned about his/her own prestige is not doing God’s work. A physician, a lawyer, a corporate executive officer concerned about income and profit do not do “good work”. Yet a baker, an auto mechanic, a trash collector, motivated by the desire to make the community a...
better place, is engaged in a “holy calling”. He or she is ac-
tively attempting to meet neighbor need and enrich the lives
of those who are served. In the process, of course, they find
meaning in their work and find their own lives elevated as
well.

Vocational discernment, however, is not just an individual-
ized activity. Persons live and work in communities; they
function within societies, professional organizations and
corporations. These organizations both empower individuals
and limit individuals in the work that they do. A physician is
empowered by the resources that health care institutions of-
fer, yet she is severely limited by the structures that control
health care delivery. A physician cannot secure access to
high cost medical procedures for America’s millions of unin-
sured. A clergyperson, dedicated to doing the work of God,
draws on institutional resources to expand the scope and ef-
effectiveness of ministry. Still, true ministry is inhibited by
Church organizations that have no sense of vocation, no real
calling to do God’s work. Focused on maintaining or grow-
ing memberships and budgets, the Church, both as individ-
ual congregations and as denominations, is often divorced
from the Church’s true calling. The Church can hide behind
the claim of “saving souls” and avoid engaging in God’s au-
thentic work.

Individuals seeking to do meaningful work are thus pro-
foundly limited by living in a culture and an age where
criminal justice systems have little to do with justice; in an
age where health care institutions leave millions without
health care; in an age where corporations generate huge in-
comes for the CEO’s and stock holders while giving little at-
tention to the needs of their workers. What does vocational
discernment mean in times such as these?

Vocational reflection begins with the search for a meaning
and a purpose greater than salary or even personal fulfill-
ment, for of such work the God of history will say, “It is not
enough.” And we, ourselves, will also know that such work
is not enough. But what is the higher purpose? Some call it
the Kingdom of God, some a world of peace and justice
where persons and creation are more important than wealth,
prestige and power. The higher purpose focuses on the well
being of the neighbor and all of creation is our neighbor.
Consequently vocation is a matter of the inner life, of our mo-
tivations. But vocation is also about serving the neighbor
well. What gifts do we have? Where can we make a differ-
ce? If I cannot bake bread without burning it, I am not
called to be a baker, but I am called to find in myself those
talents and gifts that I have which my neighbor needs.

But vocation is not solitary, it also means being called into
community; it is, after all, a priesthood of all believers and I,
too, need what others have to give. Vocation is a call to hu-
mility, to a community of giving and receiving. But vocation
also requires prophetic proclamation for we must recall our
professions and institutions back to their higher purposes.
Health care institutions must serve everyone in need of med-
care. The criminal justice system must be reclaimed to be
a system of restorative justice, not a system of punishment
that trains persons in cruelty and criminal behavior. Corpo-
rations must focus on serving the common good not the good
of shareholders. The Church must be called to build the
Kingdom of God. Individually and collectively we are called
to find and do the work that leads to, what Martin Luther
King, Jr. called, “the Kingdom of greatness”.

Wayne Presbyterian Church

Wayne Presbyterian Church is a community of people seeking to live out their
faith honestly and peacefully. Every week, they celebrate and worship God
through ancient and modern traditions of scripture, reading, teaching, singing,
offering and praying. They believe that the blending of traditional and contem-
porary music styles enables them to honor the past, yet be open to new ways of
sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The pastor, Bob Meyer believes in following
God’s lead through which we can discern opportunities to share our gifts and
offerings in ways that make a life changing difference, both for others and for
ourselves.”
CLAIMING A MOMENT

By Rev. Linda Morgan-Clement

Just when I start to doubt that there is a pattern or purpose in the larger sense, something comes along to remind me to be patient. Patient, because important things are years in the making and a moment is a space where many things, that have been years in the making, come together in a unique configuration. That was my experience with the Ministry Intern program this summer. The most important element for all of us involved was to trust the moment, each other, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. (This is why I value being Trinitarian!)

Three congregations and a college chaplaincy, four Presbyterian clergy, three young women discerning their calls, and the economic crisis came together in a few short weeks to create a life-shifting discernment opportunity. The synergy began appearing when Abbi wondered whether there might be a summer employment opportunity in one of our congregations. It grew as she began conversations with the three Presbyterian congregations in Wooster. Conversations with Laura, my quaker in the Worthy Questions program added to the synergy as it became apparent that a summer in a congregation in Wooster might be good for her as well. And then there was Emily, with whom I had been in conversation for years, a Religious Studies major, with a knack for asking deep questions, on her own discernment journey; as she prepared to enter her senior year at the College an experience of ministry was the critical next step in her discernment process.

Three rich relationships came to an intersection last spring.

In March and April, just months away from the end of the school year, the sparks began to fly. Bob took the lead as he began to develop a position for Abbi that included a community outreach component. First Presbyterian lost their youth minister and the new pastor, Jeff, opened the conversation with the session about inviting Laura, who had extensive background in youth work, to join them for the summer. The interim pastor at Westminster, Carol, went to the session with the suggestion that Emily’s gifts for discernment and questioning would be a match for a congregation in the midst of its own discernment and one of the elders who had been a part of the Chaplaincy’s Worthy Questions program championed the proposal, underlining the congregation’s obligation to the preparation of the next generation of church leaders. Then the College invented “WooCorps” a summer employment opportunity, which offered room and partial board as well as a scholarship to enrolled and returning students. All the elements were in place to create a partnership of need and resources among the interns, the chaplaincy, and the congregations.

It was important to me that quality of the women’s discernment be the priority. My office, the congregations, and Hospice would gain, but that was not my priority. Components of discernment had to be built into the program; elements that challenge many clergy but are essential for sustainable

Lisa Rumbaugh (First Presbyterian Church)

How long have you been a member of this congregation?
Since 1992

What was your relationship to the summer intern?
Lisa has two children in First Presbyterian’s youth group. Over the summer, her daughter was involved in Junior High youth group and her son in Senior High youth group. Laura Stricklen worked with both groups.

What impact did you see this program having in your congregation?
Lisa said that Laura planned great activities and took time to get to know the members of the youth group. Laura found out what they were interested in, and tailored activities to their likes. She also challenged them spiritually. Lisa saw the program’s impact on the spiritual development of the youth. Laura provided daily worship materials for Lisa and her husband, who were leading a trip, to use with the junior high students. That meant a lot to Lisa.

When Pastor Jeff Paschal was hired as pastor at First Pres. a few years ago, he became head-of-staff and was also put in charge of youth programming. This is a huge workload. When Laura stepped into the summer doing youth work, it made a huge difference in Jeff’s workload and thus a big impact on the life of the congregation. Laura worked hard to fine-tune details for mission trips, including planning flights, vehicles, and housing for a trip to Denver. The trip turned out to be very meaningful as the group was able to see the plight of inner-city residents in Denver. The kids loved Laura and miss her a lot now that the summer is over and she is abroad in Ireland. Laura was very encouraging to the youth group.
First Presbyterian Church strives to be a caring and inclusive community both inside and outside their church walls. Part of their mission statement involves providing a “free and fearless” space where people can not only grow in faith while being themselves, but also to work for reconciliation, justice and peace. Their motto “Where Caring Comes First” is embodied through their commitment to mission work in the local community, nationally and internationally. A distinctive feature about one of their programs, the high school program, has been their annual Mission trip led by the Youth Minister. In this program, youth have been involved in work camp projects serving Native Americans in Alaska, Maine and Arizona, as well as the rural and urban poor in West Virginia and Seattle, Washington. An annual work project for their college youth and Mission trip alums has been the building of a health clinic in El Paraíso, a community in the Dominican Republic. The pastor, Jeff Paschal believes that this is a community that “values inclusivity, diversity, theological and liturgical exploration, social justice and peacemaking and ministries for all ages and for many tastes, and just plain having fun”.

The experience of this past summer has been a highlight in my 25 years of ministry. I did not anticipate the way in which attention to the structure and rhythm of their spiritual lives would reform and renew the structure and rhythm of my own life. Working together with my colleagues on the project and sharing the retreat brought the gift of a stronger sense of community that is already spilling over into new possibilities and shared ministry. And, reflecting weekly with the interns strengthened the intentionality and focus of the ministry at the College of Wooster in a time of transition. Abbi’s expression of a need opened all of us to the possibility of the moment. From that decision to trust the moment, the interns, pastors, congregations and others have shared an experience of grace, joy, accomplishment, and call. The most difficult thing has been the realization that this shining summer is just that, a moment – not to be clung to, programmed, or repeated. The moment was years in the making and dependent upon relationships of care and trust. The memories and lessons will continue to shape my ministry and life. I hope that you, the reader of this issue of the OICM Advocate will allow our story to open you to claim the “moments of possibility” in your own life. 

ministry and careful listening. These included, spiritual discipline, intergenerational community, accountability, peer community, mentoring, and a rhythm of praxis. (Action/reflection/reformed action).

We built these into the covenants and weekly structure. Each intern identified a particular spiritual discipline that matched her personality and focused on an area of spiritual growth. The interns and I set aside one morning a week to reflect on their experiences. The pastors met regularly with each intern to reflect on and supervise their work. The pastors and I set up a dinner schedule for a weekly dinner that often included members of our families. The interns met together for an hour each week for a peer reflection session and, at their suggestion, all of us made a 24-hour silent retreat together.

The Three Interns  L to R: Abigail Heimach, Emily Howard, Laura Stricklen
his summer was one of intense spiritual growth, learning the meaning of discernment, forming new friendships, and being transformed by an internship that was not just a job, but that held implications for my whole self. Even now, Abbi, Laura, and I continue to share our amazement at the feeling of transformation and wholeness that resulted from our summer. We began full of questions about what the experience would hold. What would it be like to live and work in religious community? Were we “religious enough” for these internships? Would we be able to lead worship and even write and preach our first sermons? With all of this uncertainty and excitement, we trusted that we had been chosen as interns because others saw gifts in us, and we waited to see how the experience would unfold. Our questions were simultaneously answered, transformed, quieted, and strengthened as we practiced discernment together.

Throughout the summer, Abbi, Laura, and I all wrestled with the challenge of being pushed out of our comfort zones. Our work challenged us, whether it was Abbi’s time working with Hospice, Laura’s organization and planning for the youth group at First Presbyterian, or my facilitating an adult Bible Study at Westminster. Yet the challenges came from more than specific tasks. Suddenly the three of us were working in communities where it was not only acceptable to talk about God on a daily basis, it was expected. We learned to claim the religious language of Christianity as our own, and to talk about what Christian faith meant to us even in the midst of our questions. We were far from alone in these challenges – we were supported by each other, by Linda, our peers, congregations, and ministers.

A valuable source of support and discernment was our weekly reflection meeting. Each Tuesday morning, Abbi, Laura, Linda, and I gathered for prayer at Overholt House. Those mornings became sacred to us as we learned the meaning of prayer and community in a new and powerful way. We sat in silence together, we cried together, we shared joy and excitement, and we sang. Abbi described this trusting environment as essential to the program: “Overholt [House] provided a safe space that was vital to this summer. With the discomforts and joys, anxieties and questions, this was a space in which we retreated to be ourselves and find comfort.” The trust and openness found in reflecting together was a key part of our discernment.

The opportunity to work with a minister and a congregation...
also brought new insights about the meaning of ministry and the life of a faith community. Laura said that experiencing the ins-and-outs of congregational life provided support and insight, as well as the opportunity to work with a minister “who was very willing to engage me in conversation, ask me challenging questions, provide his own insight, suggest ideas, and honestly and frankly share his experiences as a minister.” We asked each minister about their call and learned that a call to ministry comes in many forms. The call to ministry is not an isolated burning bush moment, but rather a process of spiritual development and gradual listening to God’s voice. We saw through our congregations that committing to a religious and spiritual path leads to a challenging but richly meaningful life.

Each of us was asked to preach a sermon – no easy task, I assure you. Our ministers and congregations gave us this opportunity and encouraged us through the (sometimes scary) process of writing that speech and standing on the other side of the pulpit on Sunday morning. One of my favorite memories of the summer comes from the last few weeks, when Abbi, Laura, and I all preached to our respective congregations on the same Sunday. We were able to talk each other through the process of writing, and on Saturday evening we took turns standing in the massive pulpit at First Presbyterian Church. In that big empty sanctuary, with the evening light streaming in through the stained glass, we preached our sermons for each other. That moment was unforgettable. It was exciting and holy, and though we were all nervous, we left that place feeling that we had heard the word of God from each other, in spite of our inexperience as preachers.

By the end of our internship, Abbi, Laura, and I felt transformed, like we had become more of ourselves. Our gifts had been affirmed – gifts of organization and leadership, of conversation, of caring for youth and the elderly. We had learned our strengths (which were much more than we imagined) and gained confidence. Most importantly, we had been affirmed in who we are as young women, and shown that we are not alone in our passions and struggles.

A sense of awe and holiness came through in our final reflection papers. Laura wrote, “It has been a summer of discovery, doubt, assurance, community, love, anxiety, fear, deep conversation, and overwhelming faith. . . . This summer has been an incredible experience that has challenged and inspired me.” Abbi said, “This summer was better than I could have ever imagined. I gained a sense of wholeness from the Spirit and discerned a sense of my calling. I feel called to devote myself to serving God and spreading the love and message of Jesus Christ.” I reflected, “I feel that my faith has been deepened, my life has been blessed, and I have heard clues as to what my calling might be . . . though I think a calling isn’t really about reaching a conclusion but instead about continually listening for God’s voice which is spoken through mentors, peers, experiences, and emotions.”

The questions we began the summer with have been refined and changed. Now we are asking: Who are we called to be and to serve? How can we continue to grow in faith and live it out? Where can our gifts meet the needs of others? Thanks to our summer of discernment, Abbi, Laura, and I know more of what it means to live into these questions and follow them wherever they and God may take us.
Westminster Presbyterian Church

Westminster Presbyterian Church strives to be an inclusive community of believers and seekers who believe in the miracle of Jesus’ love and forgiveness to redress grievances, practice humility, advocate for social justice, commit to peacemaking and celebrate the arts for enriching human existence. Westminster’s roots go back as a congregation serving an academic community to what it is now, a diverse community that includes members from all segments of the Wayne County community. The College Internship Program is a unique program sponsored by the Church. It involves Wooster students directing and assisting with many campus initiatives such as Soup and Bread, Peace by Peace, Sisters in Spirit, En Route, Westminster Youth Group and Westminster Children’s Program.

Cinny Gooch (Westminster Presbyterian Church)

**How long have you been a member of this congregation?**
16 years.

**What was your relationship to the summer intern?**
Cinny was the person that Emily related to aside from the Minister. They used to meet once a week and “talk about spirituality”. She says it was a learning process for both of them as they went back and forth on the topic. “I enjoyed it thoroughly” says Cinny, of her experience with Emily. She was able to develop a relationship and “see Emily beyond just a student” and became friends with her, “I really appreciate the relationship”, says Cinny. She feels her and Emily “accomplished very well”.

**How did this experience impact your life and your thoughts about discernment?**
“Every new student is a bonus”, says Cinny of the students she has met so far. She says that these relationships often develop into friendship, which allows her to be more personal. So was the case with Emily, she claims. She expressed how “clever” she found Emily and thought that she had “done an excellent job while preaching”. As she shared her experience, Cinny claimed how it probably “did more me than for Emily”.

**What impact do you see this program having in your congregation?**
She says that “it improves relations with college students” and that it “gave us an opportunity for an expanded summer program.” “Another year, I would make a point of suggesting that other members take advantage of getting to know the intern better. I invited the three “church” interns over for supper and it was an interesting and fun experience,” says Cinny.

Sweet Conversations was a program for WooCorp student workers designed by the three OICM interns to provide a space for discussion about spiritual life. The program was open to students of all religious traditions or no religious tradition. Each week they came up with a discussion topic and enjoyed a delicious dessert.

Thomas Stikeleather, Class of 2010, Christian/Protestant

**What got you interested in coming to Sweet Conversations in the first place?**
Tom became interested because he wanted an intellectual and discussion based activity while he was at Wooster over the summer.

**What was one time that you remember coming away with something new?**
A new thought that Tom came away from Sweet Conversations with was music as a religious experience. While he had connected religious music to religion, he had not previously extended this idea to all types of affecting music.

**Was it different from other conversations about “religion”? If so, how?**
It was different from other conversations he has had about religion. While not a regular participant in similar groups on campus, it encouraged him to discuss religion beyond Christianity. He attended Catholic school growing up and talked about religion with peers in that context, but Sweet Conversations extended this discussion beyond Protestantism or Catholicism to even include topics such as lack of religion.

**What did you like about it?**
Something Tom especially liked was the knowledge he gained about religious spaces on campus. It was through Sweet Conversations that he discovered the Labyrinth next to Ebert, and he has returned there several times since.
Your Responses to Past Issues

I enjoyed reading the Fall-Winter edition of the Advocate. I too recall the influence of J. Barrie Shepherd, Cynthia Jarvis, and Gordon Stewart during my time at Wooster. The seeds planted there for me took a little longer to germinate. I was a math major, went to law school and then practiced law for eight years before entering seminary in 1990. I have no doubts that my experiences in law and in the church during those years were part of my preparation for pastoral ministry. I am now in my 16th year in ministry (my 14th here at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Staunton, VA). Two Wooster grads, Ed Piper and Glen Holman, are colleagues serving churches in nearby Waynesboro, VA. I appreciate the Advocate as a means of keeping us connected both with interfaith ministry at Wooster and with one another.

John Peterson, ‘79

I am writing to tell you how much I am enjoying receiving the Wooster Advocate. I feel that it is very well done and I appreciate all the work that is going into it. I graduated in 1968 as a religion major and enrolled at McCormick Theological Seminary. As a woman in seminary during the late 60’s there were many challenges, not unlike some of the ones recorded in this recent edition!

Joan Ruth (Fasold) Horn
Hummelstown, PA

The themes you have chosen have been enlightening and have given me a connection with today’s students and the journeys other students have followed after their Wooster years. I was a religion major at Wooster and also went to seminary found some of the stories particularly interesting.

Mary Norman (nee Peterson) ‘63

We love hearing from our readers!

If you have any responses or suggestions, please email us at ministries@wooster.edu or contact us by mail at:

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Send us your seasonal photos! You might see yours on the next cover of the Advocate!

I have just read through the Advocate that you sent today and found it fascinating on every page. As an early Wooster grad, I shared four happy years with Ginny Keim Brooks, who was in my class. Two decades later, as a student at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, I became friends with a number of the "heretics." Martha Ross-Mockaitis, Jon Fancher and Viki Brooks were all my classmates. Still later, as a pastor on staff at McCormick, I met Sarah and several of her fellow interns from Wooster, who were the children of my Wooster classmates. As you said, connectionalism is everything – and the College of Wooster is so often at the heart of it!

With gratitude to you for this lively publication.

Kathleen Matsushima ‘66
Presbyterian pastor in Chicago
The Office of Interfaith Campus Ministries at The College of Wooster exists to encourage and support the spiritual and religious development of students, staff and faculty.

In the midst of a diverse, multifaith people, it seeks to provide possibilities and alternatives for peacemaking, social justice, interfaith dialogue, leadership development, and spiritual growth for individuals and the community.