

Expanding Vocational Understanding: Lilly Endowment Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation

By Leslie M. Schwartz

The creation of the Program for Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) by the Lilly Endowment has supported the development of 88 institutional programs across the nation that explore vocation as a sense of one's personal calling. Lilly's example illustrates an effective way to support students' ongoing exploration of vocation and faith within their campus environments and surrounding communities.

Vocational education is a growing area within the realm of inquiry around spirituality, meaning, and purpose. Vocational development as a sense of discovering one's personal calling is strongly related to students' exploration of various life paths while in college. For this reason, many institutions are engaged in supporting programs to help students reflect on and explore these important areas.

Lilly Endowment Inc. created the Program for Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) that supports institutional programs related to vocational exploration among college students. Launched in May 1999, the Endowment invited a group of colleges and universities to participate in the PTEV and design programs for this initiative that could meet their specific institutional needs related to vocation and spirituality. Invited institutions were asked to establish or strengthen programs that would assist students in examining the relationship between faith and vocational choices in order to enhance the capacity of a school's faculty and staff to teach and mentor students effectively in this arena.

The rationale behind the creation of the PTEV initiative rests in the Endowment's commitment to developing the talents of new leaders within the higher education community through the exploration of vocation and faith development. The Endowment has identified higher education as a formative time for the exploration of vocation because they feel that "the college experience is an extremely important time in the lives of most young people...[when] many of their most important decisions are made...ranging from the choice of a career to the acceptance of a guiding faith."

Both curricular and co-curricular engagement fosters the intellectual and moral inquiry that guides the formation of vocation. The role college and university faculty and administrators play in forming the educational environment is critical in shaping the aspirations, convictions, and commitments of students during this time of vocational exploration. The Endowment feels that “colleges and universities thus have a pivotal opportunity to help students explore their options and make life-defining decisions in light of their intellectual and faith commitments.”

To date, the Endowment has donated more than \$218 million to support PTEV programs at 88 colleges and universities across the nation, including private liberal arts, non-sectarian, and religiously affiliated institutions. For a complete institutional list or more information about the PTEV request for proposal process, please visit the PTEV website. Each school's program is unique to its history and context. Some of the programs supported by these grants include:

- Incorporating the theological exploration of vocation into courses or campus experiences
- Enhancing worship on campus
- Developing or strengthening campus-ministry programs
- Restructuring or enhancing new-student orientation
- Developing or strengthening vocational reflection as a part of career services
- Expanding student internship programs
- Hosting summer theology institutes for college students and promising high-school-aged youth
- Establishing faith and learning centers or institutes
- Forming cooperative efforts with theological schools, congregations, and/or denominational offices

These examples of PTEV programs integrate vocational exploration with existing campuses services and offices – such as Residential Life, Orientation, and Career Centers – as well as creating new initiatives and expanding current campus efforts. Overall themes of faith, justice, service, leadership, civic engagement, multicultural education, and ethics among others were included in these institutional efforts to lead students through intellectual, moral, and spiritual reflection.

When reflecting on the impact of the PTEV program, Program Coordinator, Kimberlee Maphis Early shares that:

“In the seven years of the initiative, we have observed many occasions of institutional renewal, staff and faculty member development and student transformation that have been the products of a focus on vocational exploration in our PTEV partner colleges and universities. The vocabulary of vocation and its attendant reflective exercises and activities have proven to be an evocative lens through which individuals and communities can consider questions of identity, authenticity and accountability. We are also encouraged by the interest of other schools, religious bodies and non-profit organizations in the work of PTEV.”

Since the onset of the PTEV initiative, multiple resources have been created in relation to the individual campus programs, such as a text and movie bibliography that might inspire vocational reflection as well as a comprehensive list of course syllabi on vocation-themed coursework from participating institutions. Additionally, study guides have been developed on two works relating to vocational exploration: *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* and *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*. Other resources include articles that detail how participating campuses are conceptualizing the theological exploration of vocation.

These PTEV awards have generated considerable excitement, reflection, conversation, and activity on each of the selected campuses. With the concept of vocation at the center of institutional planning, educational programming, and extracurricular activity, students, faculty, and staff, as well as alumnae and parents, have benefited from this guided consideration of the concept of vocation within the realm of spiritual and faith development. For more information on the PTEV initiative, please visit <http://www.ptev.org>, or visit <http://www.lillyendowment.org> for information about the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

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