



MARQUETTE  
UNIVERSITY

College of Education  
Office of the Dean

Hello Education Majors –

I'm curious. Have you ever felt truly *called to some special service*? If so, did you share that news readily with others, only tell your closest confidantes, or keep it completely to yourself?

About a year ago, I felt a special calling, but found myself reluctant to tell anyone. I had been doing some professional work that felt very meaningful, satisfying, and noble. Despite the huge amount of time and energy required, it didn't feel like work to me at all, and I couldn't understand why. Then one day, it just dawned on me that I was simply called to do it. Even though that revelation was profound, it wasn't until much later that I actually used the word "calling" to describe my efforts to others.

In recent weeks, I've reflected on why I didn't own that calling sooner. After all, I felt extremely privileged and grateful to have received it. But still I held back. I now realize that two hurdles stood in the way of the acknowledgment. First, I didn't think I had earned a calling – that I hadn't done anything special enough to deserve one. And second, I had reverted to a way of thinking I used when I was younger – namely, that anyone who claimed to have a calling was: (a) misguided at best and (b) arrogant or self-righteous at worst. Sadly, I was embarrassed to admit to being called to service for fear of what other professionals might think.

My reflection gave rise to wondering just how many of you have *asked yourself whether teaching is a calling and are proud and appreciative if it is*. It's a very natural question to have. Who doesn't want to know if a career choice is the right one? And frankly, there is no embarrassment at all in answering honestly that you either don't know or don't feel called right now. That's because callings just happen. You must let them come to you; they can't be forced. No amount of yearning or effort or even prayer will make callings materialize. They just come about – and only when the time is right.

In fact, even though I enjoyed more than a quarter century of successful classroom instruction (in the elementary, middle, and secondary grades and later as a college professor), it was only within the last year or so that I realized teaching had been a true calling for me back then. At those points in my life, educating others was exactly what I was supposed to do. The signs of a calling were there, but I didn't recognize them.

With the passage of time and moving on to other roles in universities, I've come to believe that *we have different callings* over the course of our existence here on earth. Consequently, when we stop at different junctures, as human beings and professionals, to gauge our very "reasons for being," we are engaging in a normal, necessary, and lifelong process of self-discovery.

And in all honesty, I hope that classroom teaching becomes a calling for me again someday. For that matter, the call to teach apparently remains alive within me, because that would explain why I've felt compelled to write to you each week this semester!

But let's get back to you, and assessing whether you've been called to teach by starting with a definition. *A calling is a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action or way of being that is accompanied by deep conviction.* It can take many forms including that of a current vocation or a profession or a role to which one aspires.

As far as teaching, a calling manifests as an intense affinity for the work – *an exhilarating blend of passion, identity, meaningfulness, inner tranquility, sincere gratification, and even a sense of destiny.* Does teaching make you feel this way yet? If not, don't despair. That level of comfort and satisfaction often takes a great deal of time to develop, because the call to teach is more a matter of heart and soul than intellect.

The noted education writer, Parker Palmer, has said that, "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." Identity and integrity require discerning what is essential to you, what fits and what doesn't. It makes you whole, but not perfect; you become more real by admitting exactly who you are and who you aren't. Following this lead, a calling would mean that *teaching fits you so integrally that it qualifies as essential to your being.*

That being the case, you will have an authentic vocation. Your grand mission as a teacher then becomes increasing the world's capacity for betterment. To become actualized, this goal must translate to empowering all students to use fully their gifts and talents, imagination, powers of reasoning, and moral character.

So, all things considered, I think it's fair to say that *if you feel your professional life may one day be entirely dedicated to the service and well being of school children, then teaching might indeed be your calling.* Should that day come, if it hasn't already, you not only will know it unmistakably, but you will cherish it.

Finally, it's only right to let you know that being your dean feels like a calling to me. It's a state of mind, heart, and soul that I welcome and celebrate each and every day. And that's because *you inspire me.*

Sincerely,



Dr. Bill Henk, Dean  
College of Education