

CrossRoad Journey

Mary Long

Imagine that you were given a gift that would allow you to create a program for teens without the limitation of financial resources. The project would center on vocation and address the ultimate life questions. Dream big. How would you create the ideal venue in which adolescents could delve into their unique identities and explore their faith?

This was the question we asked ourselves in 2003 when Hellenic College received a grant from the Lilly Endowment for vocational exploration. This gift created the Office of Vocation & Ministry (OVM), and our ensuing task as newly hired staff was to create a vocational program for Orthodox Christian high schoolers.

Vocation is at the heart of the Gospel: Scripture, history and tradition point to Christ as the Caller who says to each of us, “Come, follow Me.” The staff spent months researching and brainstorming how to teach vocation, as we reviewed theology, scripture, youth culture, youth ministry and project planning. Only when staff members are well-prepared and invested in a program can they teach accurately with enthusiasm and energy.

We planned everything in detail, from the length of the program (ten days, the amount of time it takes to form a new habit) to the theology classes (taught by seminary professors—middle adolescents are ready for meatier theological material). We mapped out the objectives and impact of each activity, designing them with a clear purpose: for the students to discover the Caller and the calling.

Participants come to CrossRoad grappling with what to do when they “grow up.” One overwhelmed participant said, “I have so many options. What am I to do?” This question seems practical but at the core is a question about identity. In 2005, one of the girls in my devotional group struggled about where

to attend college and what to study. Of course, I couldn’t give her an answer; she was getting plenty of answers from other places. Another participant echoed a similar dilemma: “Everyone is willing to give me advice good and bad, but it really isn’t helping. . . . It is a huge thing to decide what you want to spend the rest of your life doing, and I always worry about choosing the wrong thing.”

CrossRoad teaches teens to ground decisions in their identity as children of God, members of God’s church, called to be

holy. Only in this framework can one make a holy decision, whether it’s what college to attend or how to spend the weekend. One of the participants in 2004 put it this way: “When we leave for college, no one will be forcing us to go to church, or to make the right choices—we will have almost complete freedom. It is now that we make the decision to have Christ and the faith be an integral part of our lives.”

As a staff member, I didn’t just invite adolescents

to reflect on their vocations; I actively reflected on my own as well. How would my unique, ongoing response to Christ’s call be played out in my life that day, that week, that year? I was a seminary student preparing to serve in the Church, but I didn’t yet know how or where. The vocational exploration piece was just as relevant to me and the other staff as it was to the participants, and still is.

As I approach another summer of CrossRoad, this time as director, I thank God for how He has used this program to affect the vocational journeys of so many, including myself.

Mary Long completed her undergraduate studies at University of Texas–Austin and then earned an MDiv from Holy Cross in 2006, where she served as a CrossRoad staff member for two years. She has returned to the OVM full-time as the director of CrossRoad.

