

# Meet Deborah Sokolove

*Deborah describes her call to teaching*



When I hear people talk about searching for their call, I often find myself somewhat bemused. While I firmly believe that God does call each of us to a particular and unique way of being in the world, the call is ultimately God's, and not mine. We need to open to hearing the call, and willing to respond to it, but I believe that the initiative belongs to God.

Perhaps it is easy for me to think in this way because I have been aware that God was calling me since I was at least twelve. This first call was to follow Jesus, and it took me about thirty years to say "yes" to it. I wrote the story of this calling, and my eventual formal conversion to Christianity, in my Spiritual Autobiography, when I became a Steward in 1991. Now, sixteen years later, I still understand that God's primary call on my life is to follow Jesus.

For all of my adult life, even before I became a Christian, I have been aware that God has called me in two other, more specific, ways, as well. I am called to be an artist; and I am called to teach.

I do not always experience the artist part as gift. Often, it is more like an affliction, something akin to obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which I feel compelled to spend many hours making small, repetitive marks, with no understanding of why I am doing so or what connection the thing I am making has

to anyone or anything else. Because I was taught to do so in art school, I am able to come up with some plausible explanations when I am required to write an artist's statement. But the truth is that what and why I paint comes from some place that I do not even begin to understand. Like more conventional spiritual disciplines, the process is often dry, boring, and unpleasant. From time to time, however, I begin to understand something new, or to feel a deep connection with the mystery that underlies everything. Even in long, spiritually dry spells, the memory and promise of such moments are the gift that keeps me following this call.

Teaching, for me, is always a gift, as well as a call. It has been a long, long journey to find myself in my current position on the faculty at Wesley Theological Seminary. While there are frustrations and limitations to any job, my job is about as perfect as it gets. Whether I am in the classroom with twenty students, showing slides and talking about the connections between art, the church, and the wider culture; leading a seminar on theological reflection in a congregational context; or counseling an individual student in my office, I am always aware that this is what I am meant to be doing. If call is defined as where one's deepest joy meets the world's great need, then it is clear that I am called to help people find their way to better understanding of their Christian heritage and to finding their own, true voice as pastors, teachers, and counselors. It is a great privilege, and a great joy, to have found a place where I am respected and employed as I attempt to follow the path the God has called me to walk.

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