**three key questions:**

at the philosophical core of Intersections, these questions can help you sort out who you want to be in the world and how you want to get there.

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1. **WHAT GIVES YOU JOY?**

Who are you? What are you passionate about? What excites you? To answer these questions, it might help to ask yourself what have been the "defining moments" in your life, the turning points that shaped who you are or the moments when you made decisions that, consciously or not, have made you the person you are today? Do these point to what gives you joy?

Note that we are talking about joy, not happiness. Feeling happy often depends on external things, your physical well being, the weather, whether you had a good night's sleep or a good meal. Joy comes from within and has to do with a deep and abiding sense of the rightness, the goodness, the fruitfulness of what you do with your life. It results from the harmony between your ambitions and your achievements. It is a gift that comes from acceptance and patience, from being at peace with the reality that surrounds you, even when that reality calls for change or when it challenges you.

And we are not talking about satisfaction. To be satisfied means to be full, to want nothing more. Joy comes from a quest that challenges you to grow, to learn more, to become more, to give more. Maybe you are good at several things. Which choices will not only use your talents but also stretch them?

No one can answer these questions but you. You can get advice from others, learn a lot from them, but ultimately only you can say what really gives you joy.

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2. **ARE YOU GOOD AT THESE THINGS?**

Do you have the talents to pursue the things that you are passionate about? Maybe it's clear to you that you do. But maybe you don't even recognize the talents that you have. Or maybe you do know some of the things you are good at but you don't think they're important. You don't see them as real strengths.

Unlike the question about what gives you joy, this question can't be answered by you alone. Your talents and skills have been nourished by significant people in your life and by communities you have belonged to, both before you came to BC and since. These relationships constitute a dialogue, a conversation about yourself with people who value you enough to challenge and support you. We seem to need these people and these communities to point out our talents to us, to give us a chance to try out our skills, and to confirm them as strengths when we succeed and even to tell us that we don't have certain talents when we fail.

So one way of answering this question is to ask yourself: Who have been the key people in your life--the relatives, teachers, coaches and mentors who have helped you know who you are and what you can do? Who have been your models? For whom are you grateful when you look at your life? What have you learned from them about yourself and about the talents that are special to you? If someone asked them to describe your strengths and weaknesses, what specific ones do you think they would mention?

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3. ** Does anybody need you to do these things?**

The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." We don't live for ourselves alone. We don't invent really big questions and worthy dreams by ourselves; the communities we belong to offer them to us. Only in relationships--and especially when we give ourselves in love to other people, to communities, and to significant ideals--do we really discover the full meaning of our lives. Because you have been shaped by your relationships and by the
communities that mark your personal history---your family, your school friends, the people you have met in service programs—you have become part of an ever wider circle of belonging.

To belong is also to take responsibility for and to contribute to the group that has nurtured your ability to donate yourself, your talents, and your time to help other men and women. This can mean sacrifice, putting aside your immediate convenience or interests to be there for someone who needs you. True, you have an obligation to keep your self-donation truly free, something that you choose to give and not something others impose on you by coercion or guilt. But finding your true self in this life means matching your gifts with the world's needs.

So a crucial third task is to define the horizons that give meaning to your life. Who are the people, what are the ideals, where are the needs that invite you to give yourself to them? Have you begun to identify these in your own life? Do they begin to suggest directions for your future?

HAVING THOUGHT ABOUT THESE THREE QUESTIONS...

- Much of the focus so far in this process has been on examining your self-awareness and your relationships with other people. But God is also part of the picture. In a Jesuit and Catholic university with a strong ecumenical tradition, we believe that all of us from all kinds of religious traditions need to look at what God might be saying to us. What is happening in those quiet times when you seek meaning and guidance beyond your friends, family, and teachers—in prayer or listening to music that moves you deeply, in those encounters with mystery that catch you and make you stop in wonder, and in the challenging moments when you encounter death or terror or failure? Where do you turn to find support and meaning? How is God moving you towards life decisions?

- Perhaps you now find yourself entertaining several life choices. That would not be surprising at all. Vocational discernment is an evolving process, a journey. Your goals may change several times as you try out some choices and learn more about the match between your passions and the world's needs. But do you feel that you are growing in possession of the kind of knowledge that will enable you eventually to narrow down these choices in the future or to figure out how to combine them?

- Do any of the ideals and directions you have identified require you to change course? Are there previous choices that you don't want to pursue anymore? Are there new choices that lead in more promising directions?

- What resources at BC (friends, groups, mentors, academic courses, service programs, retreats, etc.) do you need to make your new insights work in the months ahead?

- And, especially, are you getting better at noticing what's going on in your life, reflecting about the things you notice, and turning these reflections into decisions?