

Institute hires Associate Director

Janel Kragt Bakker was recently hired as Associate Director of the Collegeville Institute, and joined the staff on January 7.



Janel comes to the Institute with a strong foundation in theological education and religious studies. She was awarded both a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religion and Culture from the Catholic University of America. Much of her professional experience has been in teaching, and she has taught at both at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC and Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

In addition to her ongoing work in the area of sociology of religion, Janel received a dissertation fellowship from the Louisville Institute, and participated in two Summer Seminars in Christian Scholarship at Calvin College. She also completed a post-doctoral fellowship sponsored by the Initiative in Religious Practices and Practical Theology at Candler School of Theology. She reports that all of these experiences were fruitful in her own life as a Christian scholar and that facilitating such vocation-enriching experiences for others is appealing to her.

Janel and her husband, Laryn, have two children, Alleia (5yrs) and Reuben (17 mos).

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Institute Receives New Grant

The Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research has received a new five-year \$500,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for a project designed to promote clergy leadership that looks beyond the local worshipping community to further a broader civic good. Titled the **Collegeville Institute Pastoral Leaders Fellowship Program**, the new initiative will encourage leaders of congregations to draw together in their work the components of faith, leadership, and social responsibility.

Gary Reiersen, past president of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, and past board chair of the Collegeville Institute, will serve as program director for this new Institute project. "I'm excited to be directing a project that combines so many of the Institute's values: ecumenical religious leadership, social and cultural responsibility, theological reflection about things that matter, and bringing together unlikely conversation partners for a common purpose," commented Reiersen.

In the past, religious leaders in the United States, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, were commonly viewed as leaders within a wider community, town, city, state, or even the nation as a whole. Religious leaders addressed a broad range of issues including work, poverty, education, health care, and criminal justice. Sometimes they addressed such issues relating to the common good with common sense, sometimes with more fervor than wisdom (think of the costs of Prohibition, championed by many Protestant religious leaders).

The **Pastoral Leadership Fellowship Program** seeks to recapture the traditional idea of the religious leader as public, or civic, leader, but to do so in informed partnership and conver-

sation with other leaders from areas such as business, medicine, law, and education.

Specifically, the new Institute initiative will form two peer groups of accomplished pastors, five to ten years out of seminary, and convene each over a period of 22 months. Each group will meet regularly with, and learn from, leaders of other professions who have a high stake in contributing to the fabric of public life in our state.

The program seeks not to stake out advocacy positions concerning particular public issues, but to help clergy speak from an informed position about complex matters, and to exercise practical wisdom in their roles as public leaders. We hope to encourage religious leaders to address the issue of employment in Minnesota, for example, but we want their words to reflect a firm grasp of the complex issues that impact the labor force and the business community.

With the work of this grant the Institute responds to Jesus' command to love our neighbor as our self. That command requires us to love our neighbor in the fullness of his or her life, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Religious leadership therefore "refers to every moment of our life, to every space and every realm," as theologian Paul Tillich stated. Such leadership reflects the conviction that "[t]he universe is God's sanctuary. Every work day is a day of the Lord, every supper a Lord's supper, every work the fulfillment of a divine task, every joy a joy in God."

We're excited to be able to pursue such a vision of religious leadership in the **Pastoral Leaders Fellowship Program**, for the good of Minnesota, for the good of the church, and for a common good greater than both.

Meet Resident Scholar, Najeeb Michael, OP



Now 57, Dominican priest and friar Najeeb Michael recalls only one year in his life that his country has been at peace, or from another angle, only one year in his life when his homeland has *not* been at war. That one year was 1980.

Fr. Najeeb is from the Ninevah/Mosul region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers—the cradle of civilization—known in the ancient world as Mesopotamia, and in the modern world as Iraq.

As a Christian from Mesopotamia, he is a member of one of the oldest surviving religious communities in the world. Iraqi Christians believe that Christianity was brought to the area over 2000 years ago by Thomas and Thaddaeus, two of Jesus Christ's first twelve apostles. However, from the late 13th century AD to the present time, the Christian minority has suffered both widespread religious and ethnic persecution.

Under the regime of Saddam Hussein, President of Iraq from 1979-2003, Iraqi Christians were pressured to identify as Arabs, and violence against them rose. Some Christians were pressured to convert to Islam under threat of death or expulsion. Abductions, torture, bombings, and killings of Christians occurred at an alarming rate.

In 2003, immediately prior to the United States-

led invasion of Iraq which deposed Saddam Hussein, Christians represented over 4% of Iraq's population. Today, in the wake of Hussein's rule, they comprise just 2% of the country's inhabitants.

Yet, Fr. Najeeb's delightful disposition belies the dark reality of his nation's struggles. Despite the fact that sectarian violence forced his Dominican community to leave their home in Mosul where they had lived for more than 200 years, he is an energetic and charming person.

As Director of the Digital Center for Eastern Manuscripts, Fr. Najeeb has devoted the past decade of his life to salvaging and digitizing a great mass of manuscripts throughout war-torn Iraq. Through various connections and a parallel mission, Fr. Najeeb met Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) and other HMML staff members over 3 years ago. Since their initial meeting, personal friendships and a strong professional partnership have been forged.

Through this extraordinary collaboration, Fr. Najeeb was introduced to the Saint John's community. After having served several years as prior of his community, his order granted him a sabbatical and he has chosen to spend the spring semester of 2013 at Saint John's. While on campus, Fr. Najeeb will live at the Collegeville Institute, serve as an Institute resident scholar, and work on manuscripts at HMML.

It is truly our honor to have Fr. Najeeb in our midst. As someone who has a deep understanding of—and direct experience with—the struggles of the Christian minority in Iraq, he has much to teach us.

The Book Nook

Susan Sink's (2005/06 and Summer 2012) most recent publication, *Habits: 100-word Stories* is a collection of forty, 100-word stories about American Benedictine nuns in the twentieth century. Each story, told from the memories of one sister or many sisters, takes a close look at the lives of the nuns, and together the vignettes chronicle religious life and experiences from the 1920s to the 1990s. The stories' specific titles, such as "Life's Liturgy," "The Prioress," "Sabbath," and "Habits," reflect common monastic experiences through the broad themes of community life, prayer and work.

