



the milkweed group

Championing the Deep
Purposes of Higher Ed
for the Common Good

The Milkweed Group
*Fueling capacity to live
and lead for a better world.*

milkweedgroup.com
milkweedgroup@gmail.com
facebook.com/milkweedgroup

(507) 351-4269
1303 Rockbend Parkway
St. Peter, MN, 56082

Dear Colleague,



We live in a culture that thirsts for meaning; people hunger for a sense of wholeness and purpose. We also live in what scholar and author Sharon Daloz Parks calls a time of unprecedented peril *and promise* in our lives and communities, in this democracy, and on planet Earth. In these complex times, colleges and universities — no less than other institutions — face challenging questions of identity, mission, resources, and leadership, as do the people who comprise them.

My name is Dr. Chris Johnson, Founder & Principal of The Milkweed Group, LLC. I invite you to consider how I might support you, your institution, and your mission. I work with colleges and universities across the country — staff and faculty, students and alumni — to champion the deep purposes of higher education, on behalf of the common good. I serve a variety of stakeholders, including those related to:

- Faculty & staff professional development
- Students, student organizations, & student life
- Leadership & leader development
- Civic engagement & community-based learning
- Campus ministry & spiritual life
- Admission, alumni, & institutional advancement

The Milkweed Group's customizable workshops, retreats, thinking-partner consultations, speaking presentations, and individual coaching embody our mission to "create safe, courageous spaces that nourish inner wisdom, sharpen clarity of purpose, and fuel capacity to live and lead for the sake of a better world." With this letter you'll find a packet with additional information about The Milkweed Group, descriptions of sample offerings, and testimonials about my work. I also invite you to visit www.milkweedgroup.com to learn more.

Finally, I welcome an opportunity to talk with you at your earliest convenience—to learn more about your context and how I might be of service, to answer your questions, and to explore possible opportunities to work together. Please feel free to contact me by direct email (cjohnso542@gmail.com) or by phone (507-351-4269).

Especially in these times, we need more people and the institutions that shape them, to "show up" every day with the courage and integrity to make a difference. Many thanks for your important work, and for your kind consideration.

Warm regards,

Chris Johnson, PhD
Founder & Principal, The Milkweed Group, LLC

Who We Are

Mission

The Milkweed Group creates safe, courageous spaces that nourish inner wisdom, sharpen clarity of purpose, and fuel capacity to live and lead for the sake of a better world.

Vision

The vision of The Milkweed Group is to transform higher education so that its people and institutions will more intentionally and effectively live out their deep purposes on behalf of the common good.

Why It Matters

Especially in these times we need more people, and more of the institutions that shape them, to “show up” every day with the courage and integrity to make a difference. Our work will help you discover your capacity to contribute to a better world by reconnecting what you do with who you truly are.

Chris Johnson, PhD

Dr. Chris Johnson has more than 25 years of experience in teaching, speaking, writing, leading workshops, and facilitating retreats with a wide range of audiences in higher education, civic and faith-based organizations, and the business, not-for-profit, and social change communities.

Chris was founding Director of the Center for Vocational Reflection, Director for Vocation and Integrative Learning, and Associate Director of the Center for Servant Leadership at Gustavus Adolphus College in Saint Peter, Minnesota. Chris works with state, regional, and national projects around issues of vocation and purpose, life transitions, leadership development, experiential learning, civic engagement, and spirituality in life and work. He is a Circles of Trust® facilitator in association with Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage and Renewal.

Chris is co-founder of Prairie Oaks Institute, a nonprofit educational retreat center dedicated to nourishing expansive imagination, bold thinking, wise action, and cross-sector solutions to the challenges of our time.



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world.



Sample Offerings

Here are several recent examples drawn from Milkweed's array of services, including interactive workshops and presentations, spaciously reflective retreats, "thinking partner" consultations, and individualized coaching.

Please note that these examples are meant to illustrate possibilities; I can work with you to tailor a program to your context (including the option to co-design and co-facilitate). Let's talk about what would be the best fit for you.

Faculty & Staff Professional Development

- **Faculty/Staff Retreat** to reflect on identity, purpose, and calling as educators, and on how to support students' exploration of vocation.
- **Professional Development Seminar** to encourage integrative approaches to addressing societal needs and cultivating lives of commitment.
- **"Cultivating the Courage to Lead®"**: a year-long professional development academy on living and leading with greater authenticity, effectiveness, and wellbeing.

Campus Ministry & Spiritual Life

- **The "Big Questions, Deep Listening" Project** invites students to reflect on Big Questions of vocation and identity, faith and values, spirituality and justice.
- **"Sabbath" retreat** offers time, space, and permission to recalibrate our relationship with time, and renew our capacity to be present.

Students, Student Organizations, & Student Life

- Key transition points, including **"The Big Questions"** (first-year students), **"STOP" (Sophomores Thinking on Purpose)**, and **"What Should (or Could!) I Do with My Life?"** (juniors and seniors).
- **Leader Development** to cultivate reflective, "inside-out" leaders for the common good and explore connections between leading, service, and social justice.
- **Civic Engagement & Community-Based Learning** to deepen a campus-wide culture of inquiry, meaning-making, and reflection in teaching, learning, and scholarship.
- **"Stepping it Up: Peer Mentoring in Vocation, Service, & Leadership Among College Men"** supports male students to be reflective, contributing citizens of campus & community.

Admissions, Alumni, & Institutional Advancement

- Programs for parents, alumni, and friends of the college or university, and the people on campus who work with them, to nourish the deep connection between "soul and role" and to renew participants' capacity to live, work, and lead from a place of wholeness and authenticity.

A Brief Word About Cost

I realize that the economic realities facing colleges and universities are complicated. I also know that your mission, your work, and your people matter. This is an investment, one that I believe is worth it. I also believe that you'll find me to be affordable, responsive, and effective. Let's talk about it.

Past Projects

Institution: University of Northern Iowa

Project: Design & facilitation of the annual, year-long "Provost's Leadership Academy."

"Chris's work has expanded the capacity for open-hearted and open-minded leadership across the campus. It has been essential in the shift from a reactive culture, where we engaged technical problems in ways that addressed symptoms and offered short-term solutions, to a proactive culture, where we are imaginatively creating our future through engaging adaptive challenges in collaborative, inclusive, and transparent ways. Chris Johnson grounds his work in a carefully crafted balance between the most current research and a quiet distillation of the spirit. He engages both the mind and the heart, providing a safe space for individuals to listen to their inner selves, to share what they hear, and to embrace their

own capacities to offer themselves in service to the world. Given the national narrative which greatly devalues the work of higher education, we need to develop a new type of leadership across campus that responds to the diminished culture of our time. We do not merely develop cogs in a machine, worker bees; we are about the growth of whole human beings. Chris' work reminds us that this is our work, the great work of our time."

- **Jim Wohlpart, Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs**

Institution: Macalester College

Project: Faculty/staff workshop on "Creating a Culture of Reflective Practice."

"Planning the event with Chris was a treat. He listened well in order to understand our anticipated outcomes while also recognizing the important ethos of the group process. On the day of the retreat, he gently guided us into deeper discussion and rich planning. He has an intimate understanding of issues

in higher education from his many roles in the academy. Chris radiates integrity, kindness and graciousness as he masterfully guides a group process."

- **Karin Trail-Johnson, Associate Dean, Kofi Annan Institute for Global Citizenship**

Institution: Pacific Lutheran University

Project: Three campus visits across three years to lead day-long workshops on vocational reflection for faculty, staff, and administrator facilitator triads.

"While introducing a wide variety of tools of effective facilitation, Chris also managed to build in time for each facilitator triad to practice, and to reflect together about their own vocational journeys — making the workshop a matter of the head and of the heart. As a result of Chris's workshop, the Explore! Retreat helped students move beyond the mechanics of vocation as major/career choice to an understanding of vocation as a way of showing up in the world.

agenda that is simultaneously ambitious and relaxed. Chris is a gifted teacher. Beyond this, Chris' true gift is his unique capacity to model what he is teaching and to build workshops in which participants get a chance to practice and experience what true leadership and facilitation can be."

- **Lynn Hunnicutt, Professor of Economics**

Chris is a skilled and experienced workshop leader, setting an

Institution: Threehouse: A Wesley Foundation

Project: Ongoing consultation and coaching with board, staff, and students around mission, vision, values, and programs.

"Chris is excellent to work with. He has been able to lead in a way that creates space for a relaxed but productive experience. Our staff is working together better and our board of directors is much more invested in our work. The Big Questions, Deep Listening Project is setting the stage for our staff and student

leaders to host discernment and reflection opportunities across the university. I highly recommend him."

- **David Glenn-Burns, Executive Director**

"Chris prepares well, thinks deeply, provides valuable resources and is an amazingly attentive facilitator. In addition, he is easy to work with—decent, kind, and flexible."

- Faculty

"I went on the retreat hoping for clarity and to search for some answers. I didn't find any. Instead, I discovered a new way of asking life questions—one that focused on vocation rather than occupation. More than anything, I learned that it was OK to pay attention to my values, talents and my inner inclinations and to let those things drive the decision I was to make."

- Student

"With the aid and guidance of Chris Johnson I have developed a clear and certain conviction that my gifts, talents, passion, and intellect can and must be used in the pursuit of a better future for our world."

- Alumnus

Past Collaborators

Augustana College (IL)

LeadershipPlus

The Bush Foundation
(MN)

Macalester College

Carroll University

Minnesota Campus
Compact

The Columbus
Foundation (OH)

Nebraska Wesleyan
University

Council of
Independent Colleges:
Network on Vocation
in Undergraduate
Education

Pacific Lutheran
University

Dakota State
University

Threehouse: A Wesley
Foundation
(University of
Northern Iowa)

Dalton Institute on
College Student Values

University of
Northern Iowa

Hiram College

Ursuline College

Imagining America

Wartburg College

Iowa Campus Compact

Washington
University

"This has been the most valuable professional and personal growth experience I've had in my career. I feel exhausted, in a good way, and so fortunate to have had an experience of this depth, uniqueness, and power."

- Faculty &
Department
Head

"In a world that spins too fast and leaves little time, space, or reason to question one's purpose, it is especially important [to do this work]. No matter how old, each of us has different life questions, quests, and yearnings that need to be examined in a manner that is safe, constructive, and reflective."

- Faculty

"I have continuously witnessed and personally experienced the meaningful work of Chris to assist students in exploring their life's unique direction, potential, passion, and meaning, and to inspire students to make their lives count."

- Student

"Every time we work together it is like a big breath of fresh air. Chris truly cares and has an insane ability to know when to ask exactly the right question – and when to just sit and 'be' together."

- Staff

"Individuals from our consultation and retreat have taken steps to reflect further on their own and engage activities and groups where meaningful conversations take place. The Milkweed Group encouraged us to slow down and consider what's most important—a task many organizations and individuals need to do today."

- Administrative Faculty

"Chris is professional, creative and incredibly intentional about delivering on the outcomes institutions and organizations want to meet. I especially appreciate the deep thought and effort Chris put into our retreat and consultation. He understood where we were as an institution and tailored his time with us to fit our needs."

- Administrator