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Spring 2018

### An Invitation to All

Bob Pyne

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# An Invitation to All

*Robert Pyne, senior director of community engagement, directs the work of St. Norbert's Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice & Public Understanding. He also teaches several classes within SNC's peace and justice minor. Here, Pyne discusses the importance of welcoming others, no matter their country of origin.*

“Where are you from?” First-year students at St. Norbert College may tire of hearing that question from everyone they meet, but they ask it of each other, too. Hometowns are a natural place to begin when getting acquainted.

Last January, when I visited Åmål, De Pere's sister city in Sweden, I met a high school teacher whose accent told me she was clearly American. “Where are you from?” I asked. It turned out that she was from Moosic, the little town in Pennsylvania where my mother was born. I had never met anyone from my mom's hometown, and I would never have expected to do so in Sweden. That chance meeting brought a nice connection to home, to my people.



## About Our Contributor

Before coming to St. Norbert College in 2009, Robert served as director of leadership development for African Leadership & Reconciliation Ministries (ALARM). In that role, he oversaw the development and delivery of training in eight countries of sub-Saharan Africa, working primarily in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and pastoral education.



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It was especially poignant because I was in Åmål, a town of 12,000, to learn more about their recent acceptance of 2,000 or more refugees. At St. Norbert we like to talk about “radical hospitality.” Our sister city was living it.

I met teenagers who had made arduous journeys from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. One young woman told me of arriving on a Greek beach in a crowded raft. Two boys spoke of using their family's savings to cross borders in the trunk of a smuggler's car. Many had arrived in Sweden alone, their family members strewn across the Middle East and Europe like debris from a storm.

“Where are you from?” In the U.S., those with accents recognize that the seemingly benign question may mask a different motive. Often, what the questioner really wants to know is, “Do you belong here? And if not, are you planning to go back?” A student in my class recently told me that even friends sometimes introduce her by saying, “She's from Tanzania, but she plans to go back.”

Very few Swedes asked their new neighbors if they were going back. They knew it was impossible, but they also didn't want them to leave. Their influx of refugees was widely regarded as a chance to revitalize the community and its economy. Likewise, the young people I met – individuals with diverse and sometimes horrific personal stories – now saw themselves simply as Swedes, sharing hope for the future in a country that had made them feel at home.

I hope our country can be as welcoming, but I'll close this note with something a little more manageable. We want St. Norbert College to be a place where the question, “Where are you from?” is never a threat, but always an invitation. Regardless of where our students are from, or how they have journeyed, they should feel safe here, and they should feel at home. [Let us know](#) how we're doing.

A former professor of theological studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, Pyne has authored or co-authored two books and dozens of articles.

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[Take Your Best Shot\(s\) Studying 'Abroad' in D.C. When Your Student Struggles](#)  
[An Invitation to All Faith Development Opportunities Quiz Time!](#)

## Upcoming Events

Piece Brewery Chicago Happy Hour  
April 26, 2018

Final Exams  
May 7-11, 2018

Commencement  
May 13, 2018

Summer Session Begins  
May 14, 2018

Milwaukee Great Lakes Distillery Tour  
May 17, 2018

Lake Geneva Alumni and Parent Golf Outing  
May 21, 2018

Green Knights Athletics Schedule

## Things You Need to Know

[Check for Holds](#)  
Students should review holds in KnightLine before



advisement to prevent registration delays.

Commencement  
Seniors should check with the **bursar office** to ensure all bills are paid.

**StoryCorps**  
StoryCorps app hits SNC.

## St. Norbert College

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