Ripples are an everyday occurrence – a stone is thrown into a pond, a rock tumbles from a mountain into a stream, a raindrop falls into a puddle, an ice cube is dropped into a glass of water.

And the ripples spread ...

This happens in our lives too. Sometimes it is a suggestion; sometimes a word; sometimes a recommendation, sometimes an act; sometimes a relationship. These create ripples that carry us forward and forever change our lives and, perhaps, our world. This has happened to me.

I was a first generation college student, whose grandparents emigrated from Europe to live in the shadows of an oil refinery in New Jersey. My uncle was a technician making Grignard reagents for a small chemical company by day and
going to community college at night. He suggested that I go to college – a small pebble in my personal pond.

When I was an undergraduate, one of my professors dropped a word into my life, a word that I had never associated with myself. This professor started calling me “Doctor.” To this day, I can’t tell you why he did that but hearing it changed my image of myself.

I no longer wanted just a secure job; I believed that I could become an expert in my field and do things that would make a difference. As an undergraduate I became active in my professional society, the American Chemical Society (ACS); I went to graduate school; I became a member of the ACS Younger Chemists Task Force and the second chair of the Younger Chemists Committee that promotes the needs of chemical professionals in the early years of their careers; I became a Doctor!

For forty-two years I have had a satisfying vocation as a teacher-mentor at Butler University while continuing to serve my professional society on the local, regional, and national levels. At Butler I have been active in campus ministry and a staunch advocate of the Center for Faith and Vocation. One small word, “Doctor,” uttered by my undergraduate professor, became one small pebble in my personal pond that changed the direction of my life.

Similar to the single word that inspired me to become a professor of chemistry, my involvement with campus ministry and the Center for Faith and Vocation was due to a recommendation by a fellow parishioner at my church.

I was in a period of deep discernment. I had a satisfying career, but wondered about my purpose in life. How could I best serve my church, my community, mankind? I participated in a spiritual gifts workshop where people I hardly knew revealed things about me that I thought were known only to myself.

Coincidentally, while I was attending the workshop, a high school classmate from my hometown of Rahway, New Jersey, someone whom I had not seen for over 40 years, emailed me and described my high school persona. My strengths that were described in the email paralleled those uncovered in the spiritual gifts
workshop, and reinforced that I had been using my gifts for years – teaching and mentoring students.

As a result of this experience I decided to become a discussion leader of one of the small groups at my church that met for dinner once a month to discuss a popular book at that time – *A Purpose Driven Life*. I went to the local bookstore, picked up a copy, and was immediately approached by a fellow parishioner. He indicated that he was asked to join the board of the Indianapolis Lutheran-Episcopal Campus Ministry at Butler. While he did not have the time to accept the position, he strongly recommended that I fill the board vacancy. While I admittedly have mixed feelings about *A Purpose Driven Life* (the book, not the concept!), with that book in my hand, I had to accept his offer.

I joined the ILECM board in October and quickly realized that ILECM was struggling. By January I was elected board president. During my two full terms the ministry evolved into Grace Unlimited. With Charles Allen as campus minister Grace Unlimited has become a most welcoming, all-inclusive campus ministry.

My involvement with Grace Unlimited enhanced my interest in the Center for Faith and Vocation. I attended a CFV faculty retreat where I was introduced to the spiritual side of my colleagues. Colleagues, whom I had respected as teacher-scholars, became soul brothers and sisters.

During the retreat we were challenged to bring religion/spirituality into our classrooms. As a chemistry professor I was skeptical, but, ever since, before the beginning of each semester, I send my short biography to my students and ask them to send me theirs, including the one most meaningful experience that they have had, and ... whether religion/spirituality influenced their choice of major. Most of my students have a career interest in in fields related to pharmacy and medicine, so this is a relevant question. I was amazed by the candidness of the students. I learned that the average student comes to Butler with a strong sense of religion and/or spirituality and altruism. I also learned about student fears and aspirations, and for some, the heavy personal burdens that they bring with them. And the students learn that I care about them as more than students. This simple
exercise of sharing biographies establishes a mutual trust between professor and students.

I now serve on the University Committee of the Center for Faith and Vocation and, most recently, I co-chaired with Mary Ramsbottom the difficult search to fill the vacancy created when former CFV Director Judy Cebula assumed her current position with the Lilly Endowment. There were many qualified candidates, but the committee unanimously was swayed by the unique experience and exuberance of Daniel Meyers, who accepted our offer to be the new Director of the Center for Faith and Vocation. I see a bright future for both the CFV and Daniel, and I will continue my commitment to the CFV.

One word, doctor, uttered by a former professor led me to my profession and Butler University. A recommendation by a fellow parishioner led me to campus ministry and the Center for Faith and Vocation. A word and a recommendation were pebbles dropped into my personal pond causing ripples that continue to spread.

Sometimes the pebbles are not words but actions - even the simple action of asking for help.

For four decades, I worked with high school students through Science Fair, Science Olympiad, and the Indiana ACS Section High School Scholarship Exam. A few years ago I became the “interim” director of the Indiana Section United States Chemistry Olympiad program. At a local section meeting, I asked for help. A wiry, oriental Ph.D. drug discovery chemist at Eli Lilly, Dr. Jianping Huang, came forward and said he knew “how to do this,” boldly stating that together we would have a student in the national top 20 within two years.

Right! Each year ten thousand students enter a grueling sequence of local section and national exams that ultimately results in twenty students going to the U.S. Air Force Academy, and from those twenty, four are chosen for the U.S. Chemistry Olympiad team to compete internationally. To say I was skeptical of Dr. Huang’s boast is an understatement.
But, in fact, as a student in China, motivated by a love of chemistry, Jianping Huang rose from a peasant background to earn a spot on the Chinese Chemistry Olympiad team and win a gold medal in the international competition. Later, as a professor in China, Dr. Huang helped other Chinese students earn spots on the Chinese team and win gold medals. Indeed, he knew what he was talking about, and he delivered on his promise.

An Indiana Section student, David Liang, made the top 20 in two successive years. In 2013 he was selected as a U.S. Chemistry Olympiad team member and won a gold medal at the International Chemistry Olympiad in Moscow. In 2014 two of the top twenty students came from our Indiana Section ACS program. While they did not earn one of the four spots on the U.S. team that competed in Viet Nam, these two students vowed to try again in 2015.

My small pebble of asking for help, followed by Dr. Jianping Huang’s small pebble of volunteering created ripples that affected many lives, including my own, as Jianping and I have become close friends.

Relationships too can create ripples. As a teacher-mentor at Butler University, I often build close connections with my students. Michael Hole is one such student.

Knowing my love for travel, in 2008 he asked me to become advisor to a student chapter of the non-profit Ambassadors for Children, an organization that combined travel with charitable work involving needy children. I agreed, expecting a typical advisor’s role of attending meetings and signing forms.
The students in our newly formed chapter were captivated by the plight of the *Invisible Children* of Uganda. These are children who each night flee their refugee camp to avoid being captured to serve as child soldiers. Their plight was popularized through movies and more recently by the Kony 2012 campaign.

One of the movies focused on Sunday Okello, who at the time was a 15 year old orphan, caring for siblings, and trying to find the tuition for school so that he someday might become a doctor to help alleviate some of the suffering he witnessed daily. Influenced by these movies, my students wanted to travel to Uganda!

Imagine the courage it took to tell my wife that our summer vacation plan had changed. We were going to the slums of Kampala, Uganda, with a small group of college students! (Fortunately, our marriage was strong enough to withstand the ripples from that pebble!)

In the slums of Uganda, we built relationships with people who live in a poverty we had never imagined but who welcomed us with joy. We distributed food; we taught in schools built by the Indianapolis organization, *Building Tomorrow*; we saw a dedication to and belief in education that inspired us. The Butler students were so moved that upon our return to Indiana, they raised $45,000 to build a school in Uganda.

So the ripples spread ... my wife was so inspired by our experience in Uganda that she took her students at Franklin College of Indiana to actually work physically building this school.

Now one of my wife’s Franklin College colleagues returns to Uganda every other year with a group of students to work in the orphanages and refugee camps.
Our school in Uganda now serves 350 students ages 4 to 14 and provides potable water and communal farmland to the nearby village.

Michael Hole, the student who spearheaded the fundraising for the school, has gone on to earn an MD/MBA degree from Stanford and has begun a Harvard residency working as a pediatrician at the Boston Children’s Hospital. He plans to focus on primary care for the underserved. He has already formed a partnership that has started clinics in Haiti.
And Sunday Okello – the invisible child from the video? – He is now studying on a scholarship at my wife’s school, Franklin College of Indiana, where he is supported by scholarships and contributions from students, faculty and the community.

From a relationship, a request, a volunteer act the ripples have traveled mighty far!
It’s apparent from your presence here tonight that you are ripple creators. You have done and will continue to do things that matter. As you go forward in your careers, in your life, what new ripples will you create? What words will you say, even unintentionally, that change a person’s perception of him or herself? What actions will you take? What relationships will you build that just might change the world?

Thank you for your attention and for all the ripples that you are creating through your involvement with the Center for Faith and Vocation.