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WE ARE
CALLED

...

TO DO THE
RIGHT THING

a PRACTICAL GUIDE *for* LEADERS *based*
on PERSONAL REFLECTIONS & EXPERIENCE
from a LONGTIME HIGHER EDUCATION LEADER

phies listed on the contributors page. A reflection section from another colleague and friend is also included in chapter one. I am most grateful as well as indebted to them for their willingness, expertise, time, and above all, their friendship.

I have a special place in my heart for the students, staff, and faculty at North Dakota State University where I spent over three decades of my career. Many of them, particularly the students, became part of my extended family.

Thank you to First Presbyterian Church in Fargo for following God's call to generosity, welcoming me into your congregation, and giving me a spiritual home for nearly fifty years.

Finally, I want to honor all of my surrogate parents. I could not have made this journey without their love and guidance.

Forever I will be grateful for Vernon and Ruby Wold, Sandy's parents, and their family who adopted me and treated me as their own son.

Rev. Ross and Peg Robson, who gave me an opportunity by bringing me to this country for my graduate school in 1971.

Dr. Joel and Vivian Broberg, who provided my housing in Fargo until I married. Their family is very special to me.

To those of you who read this book, I want to thank and encourage you to make every effort in life to be a credible person and a leader. Remember, values are the glue that holds life's demanding details in place. I hope you enjoy reading *We Are Called*.

THE CALL: MY PERSONAL STORY

Throughout my life, people have asked how I came to live in the United States and specifically in Fargo, North Dakota. It is not a simple story, but what you will see is that God was working overtime in my life. God planned my life's journey.

The Meeting That Changed Everything

I grew up as a Christian in India, a country where Hinduism is the majority religion, Islam the second largest, and Buddhism, Sikh, and Christian religions make up a very small minority. My father was a pastor in southern India in the state of Kerala.

In 1968, Pastor Ross and Peg Robson from the First Presbyterian Church in Fargo visited the college where I was pursuing my undergraduate degree. They were in India because of a Commission on the Ecumenical Missions and Relations of the Presbyterian Church. I was one of the student leaders selected to meet with the team of people from the United States, and I was paired up with Pastor Robson for a long interview. It was during this visit that I was asked if I had ever considered attending graduate school in the United States. I replied at the time, "It is in God's hands."

Even though it was not revealed to me until 1970, in that moment Pastor Robson had made a decision to bring me to the United States for my graduate degree at North Dakota State University (NDSU) in Fargo. Back in Fargo, Pastor Robson felt called to raise the funds needed to pay for my travel and tuition. It is through the generosity of First Presbyterian Church, Fargo, that this opportunity was provided to me.

I earned my degree in agricultural studies in India and began to prepare for the long and daunting trip to the United States. I said goodbye to my parents and siblings and left the country for the first time in September

1971. Travel from India to the United States was not easy, and I was more than a little nervous at the expected twenty-three hours of flight time. Leaving family and home for two years to begin graduate school was overwhelming. Due to the high cost and difficulty of travel, it was understood that I would not return home until I had completed my studies. Nevertheless, I felt that it was God's plan for me.

My Journey to the United States: At the Airport in New Delhi, India

I was sitting at the airport in New Delhi, India, waiting for my next flight connection. I began a conversation with a couple sitting next to me. We talked about our travel, and I shared my destination – Fargo, North Dakota. Much to our mutual shock, they were also from Fargo! They shared information about Fargo, and I was taking it all in. What a small world – was this God at work? Then they asked where I would be living. I told them I would be staying with Pastor Ross and Peg Robson. Again, another shocking coincidence! The couple informed me their daughter lived next door to the Robsons. Yes, this was definitely God's work!

My Journey to the United States: At JFK Airport, New York

I arrived in the United States at JFK Airport in New York, having traveled by myself, exhausted from days of travel and sleeping on airplanes and in airports. Yet, God continued his work and had another surprise for me. Standing at my gate at JFK Airport was none other than Pastor Robson and more than twenty church members who were just returning from an international trip. Based on my tentative itinerary, Pastor Robson had planned to meet me at JFK. What he did not tell me was that he would be traveling with a large group of church members. I felt such joy and comfort at being warmly greeted and welcomed by my new church family. They had been praying for me for the past two years and felt they knew me even though we had never met. On that trip, I met people who became my lifelong friends. Ross and Peg Robson became my second parents and took such good care of me. I became a part of their family, and they accepted me as their own son. They had made a commitment to my parents that they would watch over me and guide me while I studied in the United States. I have no doubt this was all part of God's plan for me.

My Introduction to Fargo, North Dakota

During the first week in Fargo, Dr. Joel and Vivian Broberg welcomed me into their home and provided me with housing until I completed my graduate studies. They loved and cared for me in every way possible, and they too became my surrogate parents. The love, support, and generosity of Joel and Vivian played a crucial role in my growth and development.

The generosity of First Presbyterian Church and the Robson and Broberg families was God's great gift to me. Nearly fifty years later, I still consider all of them my extended family. It is impossible for me to express my gratitude to Ross and Peg. None of this would have been possible without them finding me and bringing me to the United States. I truly believe it was indeed God's calling.

Meeting the Love of My Life, Sandy

I was in my second year of graduate studies and eating out with some friends. Across the restaurant, I noticed some other friends, so I went to say hello. A young lady I had never met before, Sandy Wold, was with them. We were both immediately drawn to each other. At the time, I had no plans to enter into a relationship, but we kept showing up at the same events, frequently hung out together, and finally, we began to date. Try to picture this: it was the '70s, and interracial marriage was not very common. Sandy was a beautiful Scandinavian woman with the lightest complexion and blond hair. I was a brown-skinned, dark-haired Indian man with an Indian accent. We were an unlikely couple. For one year, we met every week at a local restaurant. We got to know each other better while we drank coffee and took notes on paper napkins. Our relationship grew as we discussed our faith, values, cultural differences, and our families in Minnesota and India. We even contemplated how our children might look.

Our relationship grew closer, so I decided to write to my parents, asking for their blessing to marry Sandy. The most agonizing part for me was waiting for a response from my parents, which due to how slow the international mail was back then, took about a month. My family understood my great love for Sandy and gave their blessing to marry and for me to make my home in the United States. Later, I would learn more about their hesitation and concerns. They were concerned about the divorce rate in the United States. They were also disappointed because they were hoping that I would return home so that they could select a bride for me through

a traditional arranged marriage. I am still overwhelmed by the love they showed us because this was certainly not how things were done in Indian culture.

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Our Wedding Day

In 1976, Sandy and I married at First Presbyterian Church in Fargo. Appropriately, Pastor Robson officiated our wedding, and both of our families were in attendance. My family loved Sandy and took her in as their own daughter. The Wolds took me into their family and accepted me fully as their son. I cherish the memories of Sandy's parents, Ruby and Vernon Wold, and their love was another one of God's great gifts to me.

God said to Abram, go from your country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. (Genesis 12:1-3)

It is unbelievable how much God has blessed my life. Replicating Abram's call became a providence for answering God's call to me.

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

What was God's plan for me in Fargo? I was called to leadership. What was required of me was exactly as it is written in this often-quoted verse in Micah – through leadership, to humbly and lovingly work in ways to bring peacefulness and justice to the workplace.

So, I began my work in student affairs and found that the values and guiding principles that I learned from my parents were critical components of being a good leader. Yes, I was called to leadership. In my various student affairs roles – from a hall director position to North Dakota State University Vice President of Student Affairs – I had the joy and privilege to advise, mentor, and supervise many people. I worked hard to instill in students under my care the importance of knowing their own values and strongly-held principles so that they could become credible people. As a leader, it was my responsibility to make good decisions, implement organizational changes to better serve the students, create a positive culture, and model servant leadership for those entrusted to my care. As a supervisor, it was my objective to hire staff members who were a good fit with the values of NDSU. I instilled in them the importance of values, ethical leadership, and principles in their personal and work lives. In turn, I empowered them to create a positive culture and serve as role models for students and staff. I believe I also helped my peers and friends in navigating muddy waters by being a good friend who tried very hard to develop relationships built on values, honesty, and integrity.

Undoubtedly, God had a bigger plan for me. I may not always understand the plans for my life, but I am a firm believer that God sees the complete picture and has control of our journey. God has been at work in my life each and every day, and I was called to serve.

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WE ARE CALLED TO LEADERSHIP

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TO UPHOLD VALUES AS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

I have been approached by people to write a book about the principles and values that have been the guiding force in my life. In essence, this book is about the incredible values and principles I learned from my parents and the application of these values in my four decades of student affairs work in higher education. I believe these principles might be applicable to your personal and professional life as well as to managers and leaders across the world.

Values are the overarching theme of this book. Ever since I was a little boy, values and principles became part of my life, primarily because of my parents. My father was the most influential person in my life, and my mother was the most loving and compassionate person I have ever known.

I was born and raised in India, but our experiences may be very similar regarding listening to parental guidance. I respected my parents a great deal, and I lived my childhood listening to what they were teaching me without expressing any disagreement. My father often used to say, "It will be meaningful to you later in your life." His words proved true, and as a result, my parents became my heroes.

To help explain my story, it is important to understand that my parents were the best models in my entire life. They lived a remarkable life. My father was a tremendous leader. He was a man of influence. In fact, he