

FST ALUMNI INTERVIEW

Alice Camille, Franciscan School of Theology at Berkeley 1984-1988

Alice Camille, a 1988 graduate of the Franciscan School of Theology, is an author, religious educator and retreat leader whose writing has earned numerous awards from the Catholic Press Association, the Associated Church Press and the interfaith Religion Communicators Council.

We recently caught up with Alice to talk about her journey to FST, her FST experience — where she served as adjunct faculty in ministry formation, preaching and proclamation after graduation — and how she's using her FST education to serve the community.

FST: Can you briefly walk us through your story?

AC: I was raised a coal miner's daughter and granddaughter in central Pennsylvania.

The sixth of nine kids, my parents sent us to Catholic schools by pinching every dime, and the idea of a vocation to the church was never far from my mind.

Of course, this was in the 1960s, when a vocation for a girl meant the convent. Lay ministry hadn't been invented yet — or so we imagined. By the time I was in college getting a B.A. in English, Mass was in the vernacular, new ministries were opening up and the church seemed a bigger, more adventurous place.

FST: How did you come to the decision to study at FST?

AC: After college, I floated without any clear direction. I was given a graduate assistantship in the English department's writing lab and after that a teaching assistantship in Humanities at another university, but I wasn't happy. Being an endless student with no goals was depressing.

It was my spiritual director at the Newman Center who suggested studying theology. She even recommended the place: The Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

As a Dominican Sister, she put me in touch with the Dominican School of Theology. I visited, staying as a guest of the Dominicans near St. Albert's. When I went for my entrance interview, I met a young Dominican Sister who asked me why in the world wasn't I enrolling at the Franciscan School of Theology? She said she would, if she were at liberty to choose!

I figured it couldn't hurt to check out another school, which was just up the street.

Then-president Kenan Osborne met me at the door of FST. Even though I cold-called at the school, Kenan took me on a very thorough tour, offered me a tuition reduction and practically sold me on the spot with his hospitality.

Still, I decided to go for the trifecta that day and headed up to Jesuit School of Theology to see what the Jesuits might offer. I was told to make an appointment and come back next week. That settled it. FST for sure!

FST: Can you tell us about your time at FST? What was your experience like?

AC: Despite having spent my entire life in school up to that point, at FST I finally fell in love with learning. Every class was exciting. Just getting the brochure listing available courses each semester was like Christmas — only you got to choose your own gifts!

I had to work several part-time jobs around the class schedule to afford the Master of Divinity degree, which was a four-year program. I remember being tired all the time, and yet I never wanted to miss a single class session.

My last year, I sat in on Francis Baur's course "The Problem of God" all over again, just for the joy of it. I always felt the professors were giving 100 percent, teaching from their passion. While I was far from a top student, it was that display of passion that stayed with me and directed me to become a lifelong learner myself.

FST: Where has your journey since FST taken you?

AC: After receiving the M.Div. in 1988, I continued working in a parish job I already had. Then, I moved on to campus ministry, a diocesan job in religious education and Catholic social services at a woman's shelter.

Eventually, I was asked by a fellow parishioner in Catholic publishing to submit an article for a magazine he was managing. The article led to a column, then an independent serial commentary and finally to the first of what is, so far, 20 books.

The last 20 years I've been a full-time, freelance writer with connections to seven Catholic publishing houses. Writers often become conference speakers, mission and retreat leaders and workshop facilitators, so I do all of the above too.

Between the very internal and intense work as a writer/catechist and the very public and energetic work in front of various assemblies, my days are very rich.

Alice is the regular testaments columnist for [US Catholic](#) magazine and a regular contributing essayist to "[Living with Christ](#)" and "[Give Us This Day](#)." For more on the writing, speaking and retreat work FST alumni Alice does, visit her website: alicecamille.com.