

“Bridges Across Borders” with Professor Wendy Angst, Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business

Pod Quad

Hosts: Father Nate Wills & Father Pete McCormick

Guest: Professor Wendy Angst

Episode Introduction

Introduction: Notre Dame is built on faith, tradition, and quads. Quads are wide-open spaces where friends connect, relax, and walk together. That's the spirit of the *Pod Quad* Show. Two Holy Cross priests, good friends, great guests, talking about life.

Fr. Nate Wills: Welcome to the *Pod Quad*. I'm Father Nate Wills.

Fr. Pete McCormick: And I'm Father Pete McCormick.

Fr. Nate Wills: Today we're joined by a Notre Dame professor who believes that the work of educating the heart and mind extends beyond the classroom, as she's helping empower communities and change the world.

Wendy Angst is a teaching professor at the Mendoza College of Business and the director of the Powerful Means Initiative. Before she was winning "favorite professor" awards and becoming well-known for her impactful What Would You Fight For? video, Professor Angst was a pioneer and entrepreneur in health care technology. But what guides her work at Notre Dame's business school isn't simply her expertise in design thinking. It's a passion to help empower others to become their best selves.

Through Wendy's work, Notre Dame students have been deeply involved in building up St. Bakhita's Vocational Training Center in Uganda. Through this work and so much more, Wendy doesn't just teach her students how to succeed – she teaches them how to serve others as Jesus taught us.

Professor Wendy Angst, welcome to the *Pod Quad*.

Wendy Angst: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Coming to Notre Dame & The Journey Map

Fr. Pete McCormick: Oh my gosh, we've been waiting for this for a really long time. Could you talk to us a little bit about what it took to come to Notre Dame, and why it is that you find yourself here now?

Wendy Angst: All right. Well, I came to Notre Dame initially because I was a trailing spouse. My husband Corey – whom I will have been married to for 29 years next week –

Fr. Pete McCormick and Fr. Nate Wills: Congratulations! That's awesome!

Wendy Angst: – Thank you. Yeah. – was hired on the tenure track at Mendoza. So, I initially came with him, but at the time, I was still working for a start-up company on the East Coast and traveling a lot back and forth. My daughter Lily, who is a first-year student here this year, was one at the time. And I found out I was expecting my son Kaden the weekend we moved into our home here.

Yeah, so that's how I ended up here. But one of my early mentors was our former dean of Mendoza, Dean Carolyn Woo. I just really admired the way she was balancing her work, her commitment to her faith, and her commitment to the Notre Dame community and students, all with being a mother. I had talked with her a few times around just, "How do you do this and what's the secret?" I shared with her that I had always had an interest and a passion in teaching, and she said, "Well, you should explore that someday." I'm like, "How do I do that?"

Long story short, I was afforded the opportunity to teach when I was pregnant with my third and youngest child, Giana. So, I taught my first class during the last trimester of my pregnancy. Um, yeah. So I really grew as a professor. All three of my kids were C-sections, so I was able to schedule her birth for the last day of my class and be back in the classroom for the spring semester.

Yeah, so that's part one. The other piece that I just want to share is I've always been a big believer in just kind of being intentional around your journey and the goals that you have. In my early 20s, another mentor that I had got me started on this notion of thinking about your life journey: what are the steps that you need to take to make sure that you're having the impact that you want to have, and living true to your values?

I wanted to share with you that I brought along a copy of a life journey map. This one's dated 2008, but it goes beyond that. On the journey map, you can see there are three horizontal lines. One is really around your personal life – your faith, your friends, your family – and the other is your career: how are you following your path and leaning into service and education?

I had written on here that by the time I'm in my 40s, I'd like to invest more time in volunteering to help women. By the time I'm in my 50s or 60s, I'd like to be a professor or just do all volunteer-oriented work. And that in my 50s, I would launch something around a "Designing Your Life" course. Only at Notre Dame do all of those things have the opportunity to come true. So, that's how I ended up here.

Fr. Nate Wills: That is amazing.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Well, I have one more follow-up question on that map somewhere. Is "One day I'd like to be on the *Pod Quad*" on there?

Wendy Angst: Absolutely. Yeah, it's actually on there every year. It's just been a recurring –

Fr. Nate Wills: – very, very fine print –

Wendy Angst: – So, I'm so glad I can check that off my list. Thank you.

Fr. Nate Wills: That's amazing. Wow, that's so intentional. I don't even know what I'm doing later on today.

Designing Your Life Paths

Fr. Pete McCormick: I'd love to follow up on this, though. In all seriousness, that could be a really overwhelming thing to try to put together.

Wendy Angst: Yes. Yes.

Fr. Pete McCormick: How did you even start? Like, how do you think about that? Because oftentimes people are just making it day-to-day. To be able to have the discipline and the vision to step back, look out, and say, "Yeah, these are the things that I generally would like to work towards" – what was that like?

Wendy Angst: Yeah. So, I do this intentionally a couple of different ways with students here. In every class that I've taught over the past 15 years I've been here, I have a "Professor's Choice" lecture at the end of class where I challenge students to think about their life on three different paths.

- Path 1: What is the path that you're currently pursuing? If you graduate from Notre Dame with a degree and do what you thought you would do.
- Path 2: Thinking about if that path did not exist, what might be another path that you would take?
- Path 3: Looking at if money was no object, or if you were just completely leaning into a calling or a service project that you wanted to do, what would that look like?

Mapping out these different journeys allows them to think about what it would look like to pursue them, and how to balance that with the way they want to show up as a friend, a daughter, a son, or a spouse. You know, just thinking about what are the things that you need to keep in mind on those paths, and how they complement and compete with one another.

I always talk about the fact that this isn't saying, "This is the path that you're taking no matter what." I call it a parking place for dreams, right? You put a lot of things down. And so, you know, my dream of being on this *Pod Quad* has finally come true. But one of my dreams that has not yet come true is being fluent in Italian. I bump that out every year, and I've been bumping it out for 25 years now. So, at some point, maybe it'll happen.

Fr. Nate Wills: But yeah, you and me both, Wendy. Yeah, that's on my list, too.

Wendy Angst: Is it?

Fr. Nate Wills: Yeah.

Wendy Angst: Well, see, you do have a list then!

Fr. Nate Wills: Well, kind of. Just have to get it on the journey map.

St. Bakhita's Partnership in Uganda

Fr. Nate Wills: So, you talked about service, and one of the things that we're really interested in hearing about is your work with St. Bakhita's in Uganda. Can you paint us a picture of this

partnership? It's been described as a lab for education, an epicenter for innovation, and an accelerator for generational change for women.

Wendy Angst: Yes, happy to talk more about that. I first learned about St. Bakhita's when I was teaching my innovation and design course in the spring of 2020. Another project with a large banking firm had just kind of not come to fruition. Hearing about that school – and again, leaning back to the journey map – I thought, “This might be God's way of saying it's time to get involved in this type of project work.”

I was afforded the opportunity to travel with 10 Notre Dame students over that spring break. We were using it as a time to test out our ideas and get feedback on some of the early innovations we were looking at. This vocational school had originally been opened in 2007 for young women and girls that had been abducted by the LRA. By 2020, it was on the verge of closing. Western aid had dried up, and there just wasn't support there in this really impoverished region. So, we were focused on how to help this vocational school continue to stay open and serve the community.

But I would tell you that when we arrived on the ground, our perspectives changed. We did a lot of work, had a lot of conversations, read a lot, and watched as many documentaries as we could. But when you're on the ground, it just gives you that different opportunity to really be a part of their lives, the environment, and how things are happening.

The poverty rate in this part of Uganda is well over 70 percent. People live in mud huts, they don't have running water or electricity, and education is very rare to come by. We returned really committed to not just giving a recommendation and walking away, but continuing to walk with the people in Uganda to implement these ideas.

We were really fortunate through the work that we were doing that semester. We had a student, Victoria Yanjura, pursuing her master's degree in peace studies over at the Keough School of Global Affairs. Victoria herself had been abducted by the LRA as a young girl and held captive for eight years. She became a really great friend and mentor to me through this work, and then ended up stepping into the role of head of school.

The school, like every school – our school included – closed for COVID-19. We reopened the school in November of 2021 with Victoria as our head of school. I would tell you that of the students that were on that first trip, over half of them continue to stay engaged in that work. We've had over a hundred Notre Dame students travel to St. Bakhita's so far since this project began.

The first student project we launched was planting 22,000 trees to help with sustainability and food insecurity. So that's been a really awesome project. We've done a project with the architecture students where they helped design a restaurant for us that supports hospitality training and gives the community a great place to gather and actually watch TV – we have TVs installed. So, that's been great.

They've also helped build an early childhood development center. The women that come to our school – it's a boarding school for learning a vocation – bring their children with them. We have a center now where their kids can also receive an education. Those are just two of well over 20 projects that students have worked on and that we've been implementing at the school to really help with our goals of ensuring the school can be self-sustaining, supporting the young women to have the opportunity to thrive, and improving the economic prosperity of the region.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Wonderful. Now Nate, I know this, so this if more for those who are listening to this podcast: what is the LRA?

Wendy Angst: The Lord's Resistance Army. That was a horrific conflict where the mode of operation of Joseph Kony was to abduct children. Estimates are that well over 60,000 children had been abducted to serve as soldiers or be wives for the soldiers. Yeah, wives for the soldiers. It was just a really horrible conflict that didn't end all that long ago. The after-effects of that war in this region have just really been heavy and difficult to move through.

It's a region of such beautiful, faith-filled people across the board. Every student that I've taken there leaves with this renewed sense of optimism around the importance of life. Life isn't about your things, right? It's about the community, the people that you're with, and your faith. They've had to overcome a lot, but the joy and the welcoming nature of being in that community – I just wish everyone would have an opportunity to experience it. It's really, really special.

The 38-Hour Journey & Impact

Fr. Pete McCormick: So, you anticipated my next question, which is: can you walk people through the journey from Northern Indiana to St. Bakhita's? What have been some of the reactions upon making that journey and falling in love with that community?

Wendy Angst: Yeah. So, the journey from South Bend to St. Bakhita's is not a quick one. I've always preferred just not to track it, but I did have one savvy student turn on her timer when we pulled out from the Main Circle, and it was 38 hours to the door.

Fr. Nate Wills: Wow.

Wendy Angst: Yeah. So, it's a pretty long flight. And then once we land on the ground, it's a 10-hour drive north. Our school is almost up to South Sudan, up in the Agago district of Uganda.

But I would say when we arrive at the school, we are always greeted by the students with beautiful African dances. They'll meet us as we come through the gate and escort us while doing the Ugandan shrill, which I have not yet mastered. Also on my life journey map!

Fr. Nate Wills: That was not on mine. Not yet. Not yet. Maybe after, I don't know.

Wendy Angst: Yeah, yeah. But I did bring along – I printed them out just because I knew that you were going to ask me about that – a couple of letters, because the students write the most beautiful letters.

One reads:

"This was to one of the families that supports the ability for our students to travel there cost-free as a part of this immersion: 'Thank you so much for your generosity to make this trip possible. Being able to go to Uganda and visit Janet and Julian, whom I had been working with all semester in class, is a moment that I will hold on to forever. I have never been able to be immersed in a culture before with people that I care so much about. Being able to set foot at the school and physically see and feel the impact that Notre Dame is bringing to the community is life-changing.'"

And then one other one that I want to share, just because I thought you would appreciate it:

"I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for granting me the opportunity to be a part of the immersion team that journeyed to Uganda during fall break. The experience has been nothing short of transformational for me. To be completely honest, prior to this excursion, I was facing spiritual struggles. It was during this time at St. Bakhita's that I found my faith rekindled. The unwavering courage, faith, and resilience exhibited by these remarkable women left an indelible mark on my heart. Initially, I thought I would be the one teaching and assisting them. But in reality, I ended up learning so much more from them and rekindled a profound spiritual boost through our interactions. Once again, I want to express my deepest appreciation for making this journey possible."

Fr. Pete McCormick: That's incredible.

Fr. Nate Wills: Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. Wow.

Fr. Pete McCormick: That must make your heart soar.

Wendy Angst: Oh, it absolutely does. Yeah, yeah. And what's been so beautiful about this work is that it has really benefited from a group we call our "Powerful Means Circle" – former parents of students that have been in this class, and just individuals that have heard about this work. They reach out and they mentor the students with different projects, make themselves available, and join student presentations a couple of times a year. So, it's really our entire Notre Dame family.

Aside from them, I've been so blessed to benefit from colleagues across the university. I know, Father Nate, I've tapped your shoulder a couple of times for feedback on ACE education. Chrissy Trinter, Neil Boothby, Paul Brenner, Anne Marie Camado... there have been so many faculty across the university that just kind of jump in and help when needed because there's a lot happening with this partnership, and a lot of different ways that students want to engage that aligns with their interests. It's been really beautiful to see the entire community coming together.

Mentoring the Next Generation of Women

Fr. Nate Wills: Right on. It's funny you mentioned Chrissy because I was thinking that you're not only mentoring these women in Uganda, but you're also really intentional about mentoring young women here at Notre Dame. I just think you're a great example of somebody who's being so thoughtful about helping women on their professional trajectory.

People like Chrissy Trinter over at the Institute for Educational Initiatives, Kathy Cummings over in American Studies and History, Sarah LePhart in Development, Sonia Howell over in Notre Dame Learning... these are women at Notre Dame who are being so intentional about mentoring other young women and helping them to grow in their vision and in their careers. How do you find the time, or why do you carve out the time to do that amidst all of the other time crunches and responsibilities you have in your life and career?

Wendy Angst: Well, I would just say thank you, first of all, for putting my name among those really fantastic women. That's really an honor. But I would say it's such a privilege to be here at Notre Dame and engaging with our students. I truly mean it that it gives you hope in the world when you have an opportunity to really engage with our young people here.

There are two parts to that answer I'd like to give. One goes back to the fact that Carolyn Woo was one of my early mentors, but she actually became a mentor for me even before we agreed to move

our growing family to Notre Dame. Corey had interviewed on the tenure track, which is pretty low on the totem pole when it comes to academic recruitment – I mean, he's a special guy, but still.

What really struck me is one day I was driving back from work just outside of Philadelphia. My cell phone rang, I didn't recognize the number, and I answered it. The voice said, "Hello, this is Dean Carolyn Woo." And I was like, "What? Why is the dean of the business school calling me, the spouse of a non-committed tenure-track hire?"

She was just reaching out to let me know how much Notre Dame would love to have our family here on campus. I'm such a big believer – and we talk about this in business a lot – that you can learn a lot about a person by the way they treat people when no one is watching, or how they treat the person at the front desk, for example. That to me was such a good testament to the community here. So I would say that's one piece of it. I've had the opportunity to learn from really great people.

The other thing I would say is that—and I know you know this as well from working with our Notre Dame students—they are at the top of their class before they come here. Right now, I think our acceptance rate is around 9 percent, which is just incredible. Then they get here and they kind of lose sight of the fact that they are exceptional and here for a reason. They have so many gifts, and they are a part of something much bigger than themselves.

So I just appreciate the opportunity to remind them that they are awesome. I would put stock in any one of them; investing in these students will always pay off in dividends. I just love the opportunity to remind them that they are incredible people and we are so lucky that they are a part of this family.

Fr. Nate Wills: Well, it's a beautiful investment in the students of Notre Dame. Thanks, it's awesome.

Teaching Awards & The Secret to Success

Fr. Pete McCormick: So, you have won multiple teaching awards. Nate and I have won none. Zero.

Fr. Nate Wills: Zero.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Like, maybe – who knows? – maybe this is the year. Come on.

When you think about the awards – and I'm not going to require you to toot your own horn, so we'll just do it for you because greatness is in our presence – what do you think people are responding to when they recognize what it is that you've done as a distinguished professor?

Wendy Angst: Okay. Well, let me first of all address you two saying that you haven't won teaching awards. I just wanted to ask: are you rapping knuckles with rulers? Because if you are, I would stop that.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Oh, that's good.

Fr. Nate Wills: As a helpful teaching professor, that is not a best practice. I can tell you a best practice!

Fr. Pete McCormick: Okay, editor's note: get rid of the rulers.

Wendy Angst: Yeah, I would say... I don't know, it could be that I'm teaching fewer classes than you both, or in a smaller program. My approach to teaching is very much experiential. I really believe in

learning by doing. I think it affords students the opportunity to not just apply what they're learning and really live our Notre Dame value of educating hearts and minds, but it also gives them the opportunity to discern and try out different things and different roles. So, I would say that would be one piece.

A second piece I would say is that I feed them.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Okay?

Wendy Angst: And you know that really goes a long way. I live on the south side of town, very close to a Panera Bread. If you do not know, Tuesday is half-price bagel day. I teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So, if we have a speaker coming in or some milestone in the class, I will bring bagels in.

And then also, Corey and I love to host students at our home. We'll have students over for dinner, or our most popular event is S'mores Night, where we have different themed s'mores. This includes "The Elvis," which has bacon, peanut butter, and dark chocolate. So, yeah.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Okay, give me – wait, wait, wait, wait. This is a foreign concept to me. I understand the concept of a s'more, but I did not realize that s'mores could be modified.

Wendy Angst: Oh, yeah You've got "The Elvis," which is a really impressive one. It's banana, peanut butter, and bacon on there.

I would say the second most popular one is the Chocolate Mint. You have a chocolate mint chocolate with fresh mint leaves on the s'more with a chocolate graham cracker.

Fr. Pete McCormick: With a chocolate graham cracker?!

Wendy Angst: A chocolate graham cracker. And then we also do one with fresh raspberries and a raspberry chocolate.

Fr. Nate Wills: Wow, that's really impressive. I have done it with a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup and I thought I was hot stuff. That is next level, Wendy.

Wendy Angst: Yeah, yep. There you go, that's the secret.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Well, no, no, no. To me, the food certainly helps, but what I've found in terms of my interactions with students is that when you can show intentionality and pour into them in that way – and you clearly do this so graciously – it's transformative for them. They do oftentimes struggle with the sense of, "Maybe I just wasn't all that... maybe I was a little bit too hyped up in my high school years and I get here and you're swimming with other big fish." You begin to question what it is that you have to offer. To have someone so powerfully invest in them, remind them of who they are, who they're called to be, and how many people are depending on them is really transformative. That's awesome. It's sufficient to say, though, that Notre Dame is better because you're here. So, thank you for all you do.

Wendy Angst: Thank you, and you as well.

Design Thinking & Preaching

Fr. Nate Wills: So Wendy, I heard that you once had students apply design thinking to improve the homiletic practices of priests. You've got two right here. How can we learn from the design thinking process to be better preachers?

Wendy Angst: Let me just say, those were not Holy Cross priests!

Fr. Pete McCormick: Thank you. Yeah. Because I've never given a bad homily. Never.

Fr. Nate Wills: Is that right? Good for you.

Fr. Pete McCormick: In the past three days.

Wendy Angst: I would say that that is actually not true; it's something that we've joked about of, you know, there's some opportunities, as there is for any type of interaction. But I feel like, as priests, you're already kind of building into the design thinking foundation, which is empathy and really getting to know the individuals that you're serving.

I was thinking, though, about some of the fun elements of design thinking – and if you guys want to do a project next year for innovation and design, let me know! One of the frameworks that we use was developed by Clayton Christensen – rest in peace, but he was the father of disruptive innovation and really began focusing on this type of work later in his years at Harvard – this notion around "jobs to be done." Everything that a person does, they're "hiring" something for a job to be done.

So, I was thinking about what people are hiring a homily to do for them, right? Just from my own reflection as a person who goes to a few different parishes... and just as a quick note, part of the reason that I ended up at St. Joe's, or my children did, is because Father Nate was in my running group when I first moved here.

Fr. Nate Wills: That's true.

Wendy Angst: And I did not know that Father Nate or Father John DeRiso were priests! We would just be on runs, and then one night we went out for drinks and they showed up in collars. I'm like, "Wait, what? Like, where can I follow you two?" And so that's how I ended up at St. Joe, and my children all went to school there because of them.

But I would say, you know, "job to be done" – if you're going to St. Joe, it's really good for young families, at least for me as a young family. Right now, when we're taking our kids, a lot of times we'll go to Our Lady of Loretto and enjoy that. And if I really need some inspiration just kicking off the teaching week, I will go to the law school mass with Father Bill Dailey, who hones in and gets you kind of academically oriented through the homily. So, yeah.

Fr. Nate Wills: That's great. Yeah, I love that. I actually love that Christensen framework, and his student Michael Horn and Heather Staker do a lot of the work in my field. It's really interesting. I love that idea of disruptive innovation and thinking as well. Pretty awesome. That's really cool.

Final Question & Words of Wisdom

Fr. Pete McCormick: Okay, so we're coming to the last question here. It's arrived. And it is this: it affords us the chance every time to ask the incredible guests that we've had on the *Pod Quad* for a

piece of advice that they would offer – something that you would say, "Hey, this is something worth thinking about as you go throughout the course of your day." And so with that, what would you like to share with *Pod Quad Nation*?

Wendy Angst: Alright. So, what I would share... this is actually a vignette that I put up at the end of my Designing Your Life class in my Professor's Choice lecture. It's from author Dan Zadra. I'll paraphrase it a little bit, but: "When you reach the end of your life, do you want to be one of the people who wish they had, or be one of the people who are glad that they did?"

Live your life so that you not only say that you stood for something, but that you acted on it, and have your inheritance be an example of how to live a full and meaningful life grounded in your values.

Fr. Pete McCormick: I think we call that a mic drop. Professor Wendy Angst, thank you so very much.

Wendy Angst: Thank you both. What an honor to be here, and I'm so excited that I get to cross this off my life journey map. Thank you.

Fr. Pete McCormick: You're welcome. Thank you.

The Last Lap

Fr. Nate Wills: All right. Well, welcome to the Last Lap. We'll take a little look back at our conversation and talk about what struck us.

Fr. Pete McCormick: What got me going is truly the vision that she had for her life. Like, I don't know – I mentioned it in our conversation – to have the courage to be able to lay this thing out, look at a blank piece of paper and say, "Okay, when I'm in my 30s, my 40s, and my 50s..." What I love about that is the courage and the belief to take your shot.

My sense sometimes is that people are afraid. They don't necessarily appreciate or value the gifts that they have within themselves. They sometimes doubt themselves in a way that they think, "Well, maybe I'm not as good as whomever," and as a result, "I'm just going to stay here and not actually pursue what really has been placed on my heart and mind."

For Professor Angst to do that in such a beautiful way, and to take these moments of her life and say, "You know what, this is an opportunity now for me to pursue this thing that I've had placed on my heart and to do it" – it might not unfold in the exact way that she thought it was going to unfold, but at the same time, to see that on-ramp and to take it with gusto... I just think it's so inspiring.

Fr. Nate Wills: Yeah. She's just not afraid to do the hard things in order to achieve those goals, too. I mean, even when she was talking about the short-term – how long it takes to get to Uganda

Fr. Pete McCormick: Right?!

Fr. Nate Wills: She just sees that like, "No, no, this is worth it. This is worth it."

I love the way that she's believed in the students and their vision of helping out this important work in Uganda at the St. Bakhita School to make it sustainable, to make it really transformative for their students and for ours, which I think is really incredible. I just really appreciate the way that she has just been so thoughtful in a bunch of different ways in building up our students.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Yep.

Fr. Nate Wills: I love how she talked about the way that our students kind of go from being the big fish in a little pond to a little fish in a big pond, and the scariness of that, and the way that she just really tries to empower them and help them believe in the dignity of the human person and their dignity as a beloved child of God. I think that is critically important.

She talked about literally investing in these students, and I think that is so important. You do this all the time in campus ministry, I see it, and it's just so cool to see. We try to do this in our dorms, right? To invest in students and to help them, especially when they don't believe in themselves and can't find their own North Star – to point them to Christ, to point them to the gift of serving others, of thinking less about themselves and more about using their gifts at the service of the Kingdom.

I just think the way that she does that, especially for young women at Notre Dame, is totally awesome. She's had great mentors in her life, and she's mentoring other people.

Fr. Pete McCormick: That's right.

Fr. Nate Wills: I think that's an incredible gift to our community.

Fr. Pete McCormick: Yep. There's the old African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." To think about: how is it that we can make sure that we're investing in people so that we can get to that place – heaven – together?

Fr. Nate Wills: Yeah, I love that. Well, thanks very much, and thanks for joining us on the *Pod Quad* today with Professor Wendy Angst. Thank you. God bless you, and we'll see you on the quad.