

Great Expectations: Responsible, Competent, Catholic Leaders

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I was invited to be the keynote speaker at the Student Life Leadership Appreciation Luncheon at Franciscan University of Steubenville, a Catholic-Franciscan university in Steubenville, Ohio. The luncheon was the conclusion of a weekend student leadership conference on becoming effective Catholic leaders.

During my preparation, the theme that unfolded was to present a challenge to greatness — to have *great expectations* — and no longer accept mediocrity as a norm in life.

I began by recalling Saint Pope John Paul II's closing words to the youth gathered at the Kiel Center in St. Louis, MO, January 26, 1999: "Remember: Christ is calling you; the Church needs you; the Pope believes in you and he expects great things of you!"¹

Great Expectations

Saint John Paul II expected "great things" from the gathered youth; we at Franciscan University of Steubenville, as well, expect great things from our students. We have *great expectations* of them. But I wonder: Do they have *great expectations* for their own life?

Management expert Peter Drucker recalled a question posed by a teacher when he was 13 years old. The teacher asked each student, "What do you want to be remembered for?"²

No one could answer, but the teacher chuckled and said, "I didn't expect you to be able to answer it. But if you still can't answer it by the time you are 50, then you will have wasted your life."

Drucker went to his 60th class reunion, and one of his fellow students asked, "Do you remember Father Pflieger and that question?"

They all remembered it. And each one said it had made a big difference in his life, although each didn't understand it until he was in his 40s. They had begun trying to answer the question in their 20s, but the answers they came up with didn't last. It took longer to discover what really mattered.

Drucker went on to say, “I’m always asking that question: What do you want to be remembered for?” He finds the question induces him to renew himself because it pushes him to see himself as a different person — the person he can *become*.

Drucker believes people are fortunate if someone with the moral authority of a teacher asks them that question early in their lives, then they will continue to ask it as long as they live.

That is a good question to keep asking yourself throughout life, “What do you want to be remembered for?” If you keep this question always in mind, you might find yourself making better choices and decisions along the way.

By the way, if you haven’t figured it out yet, people will talk about you anyway. They talk of what they remember about you. So give them something worth remembering, something worth talking about. Reach high! Set a mark worth talking about! In life, isn’t it true that most people really want to ring the proverbial “bell.” However, to ring the proverbial “bell” in life requires one to stretch, which is a bit farther than simply to reach. The challenge of *great expectations* is to stretch yourself, and loudly ring the bell!

Meaning and a Sense of Mission

The bishops of the United States, in “Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium,”³ wrote:

In their work — teaching, cosmetology, medicine, the arts, house painting, real estate — laity discover both meaning and a sense of mission, relating their work to their spiritual life. Their work paths, no matter how diverse, often help them to move beyond self-absorption toward active caring for others.

That’s worth repeating: *In their work...laity discover both meaning and a sense of mission,...to move beyond self-absorption toward active caring for others.*

Discovering what gives your life meaning; what fills you with “a sense of mission” will give you the freedom to get out of that little world called “me” in which people frequently can get stuck. You are then free “to move beyond self-absorption toward active caring for others.”

Saint Pope John Paul II wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, “Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful and in the World”⁴

...that [the laity's] "own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, as well as the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media....The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them, and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers ...the more these realities will be at the service of the Kingdom of God and therefore at the service of salvation in Jesus Christ...

Again we hear: *the more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, **clearly involved** in them, **competent** to promote them, and **conscious** that they must **exercise to the full** their Christian powers...the more these realities will be at the service...*(emphases mine).

"Clearly involved" — "competent" — "conscious" — "exercise to the full" are characteristics required by every leader in today's complex and demanding society. Such is the challenge to greatness that involves considerable preparation and awareness.

Let me ask, "Have you read the document *Christifideles Laici*?" It is a document that speaks in great depth on the vocation and mission of lay men and women within the daily activities of everyday life. A powerful statement for men and women to meet the challenges facing today's generation.

Maybe this will be the catalyst for young Catholic men and woman to take up the challenge we heard in *Christifideles Laici*:⁵

...[the laity's] own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, as well as the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media....

Responsible Citizenship Is a Virtue

The topic of Catholic involvement in civic responsibility is addressed by the United States' Catholic Bishops, in *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*,⁶ in which they state:

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. Every believer is called to faithful citizenship, to become an informed, active, and responsible participant in the political process....

'We encourage all citizens, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity to participate in

building the culture of life. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power.’

Did you hear that: *Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power.*

That got me thinking about two key words: *responsible* and *citizenship*. I checked the terms at *The Britannica Dictionary*:

RESPONSIBLE⁷: used to describe the person or thing that causes something to happen; able to be trusted to do what is right or to do the things that are expected or required.

CITIZENSHIP⁸: the qualities that a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.

As a responsible citizen, each Catholic man and woman has a “moral obligation”...*to become an informed, active, and responsible participant in the political process...to participate in building the culture of life....Every voice matters....*⁹

Maybe some of you will be inspired to consider public affairs as an arena of ministry for evangelization and mission.

Competent and Capable

If so, consider this text from the II Vatican Council’s “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity” that states:

...The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere.¹⁰

...Catholics skilled in public affairs and adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine should not refuse to administer public affairs since by doing this in a worthy manner they can both further the common good and at the same time prepare the way for the Gospel.¹¹

A few key points need emphasis: Catholic men and women *must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation*. They must be *skilled in public affairs* and must be *adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine*, and *should not refuse to administer public affairs*.

Catholic leaders in today's society must properly equip themselves to learn all the necessary skills to be competent in the arena of public affairs, i.e., rhetoric, debate, economics, civility and law, to name just a few. As well, they are to be enlightened through the teachings of Christian doctrine and faith. Simply put, Catholic leaders are to become competent and capable with all the tools necessary to perform their tasks in a qualified and competent manner.

Jesus, likewise, prepared his disciples for the trials of ministry when he told them, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16 [NIV])¹².

You've got to admire that advice. To "be as shrewd as" means you need to be mentally sharp or clever¹³, and recognize all the skills involved in the public arena; yet, enlightened with faith and Christian doctrine, you need to remain civil and calm in the discourse of public affairs.

New Generation of Builders

Finally, I leave you with a closing exhortation from Saint John Paul II from World Youth Day – 2002¹⁴ when, and take this to heart, he said in a confident tone:

The aspiration that humanity nurtures, amid countless injustices and sufferings, is the hope of a new civilization marked by freedom and peace. But for such an undertaking, a *new generation of builders* is needed. Moved not by fear or violence but by the urgency of genuine love, they must learn to build, brick by brick, the city of God within the city of man.

Allow me, dear young people, to consign this hope of mine to you: *you must be those "builders"!* You are the men and women of tomorrow. The future is in your hearts and in your hands. God is entrusting to you the task, at once difficult and uplifting, of working with him in the building of the civilization of love.

Take to heart these words: You are the *new generation of builders...The future is in your hearts and in your hands...building the civilization of love, the culture of life.* This is your generation's challenge to greatness — to have *great expectations* as responsible, competent, Catholic leaders.

Notes:

1. Pope John Paul II, "Holy Father John Paul II to the Young People," Speeches January 1999, The Vatican, January 26, 1999, #6,

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_26011999_stlouis-youth.html.

2. Brian Cavanaugh, TOR, “To Be Remembered for What?” Sower’s Seeds of Encouragement: 100 Stories of Hope, Humor & Healing. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998) 75-76.

3. “The Witness of Their Lives,” “Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium,” Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Washington, D.C., November 1995,
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/laity-marriage-family-life-youth/called-and-gifted-third-millennium-1995>.

4. Pope John Paul II. “Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World,” Apostolic Exhortations, The Vatican, December 30, 1988, #23,
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html.

5. *Ibid.*, “Christifideles Laici, #23.”

6. “A Call to Faithful Citizenship,” “Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Washington, D.C., October 1999,
<https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/faithful-citizenship-civic-responsibility-new-millennium>.

7. “Responsible,” *The Britannica Dictionary* accessed on 11/8/2022,
<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/responsible>.

8. “Citizenship,” *The Britannica Dictionary*, accessed on 11/8/2022,
<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/citizenship>.

9. *Op. Cit.*, “Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium.”

10. “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.” Resource Library: Documents of II Vatican Council, The Vatican, November 18, 1965, #7,
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.

11. *Ibid.*, “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*,” #14.

12. NIV, Matthew 10:16.

13. “Shrewd,” *The Britannica Dictionary*, accessed on 11/8/2022,
<https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/shrewd>.

14. Pope John Paul II, “17th World Youth Day–Evening Vigil with Young People,” Speeches July 2002, The Vatican, July 27, 2002, #4,
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/july/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020727_wyd-vigil-address_en.html.

