

► President's LETTER

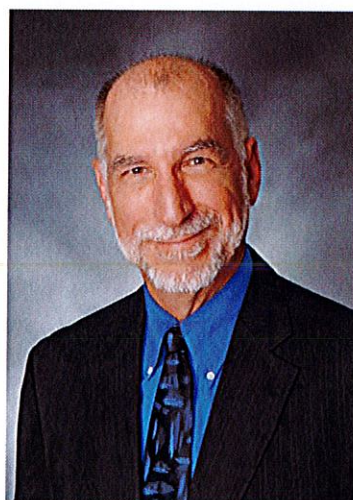
Parting Words

As many of you know, I have announced my retirement as president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, effective June 30, 2019. As the time draws closer to my last day, I am recognizing the many things that I will miss — working alongside dedicated people, engaging in vibrant conversations about Catholic higher education, and visiting member campuses as a consultant or speaker. I will miss representing your good work to the media, the Church, and government. Most of all, I will cherish the one-on-one mentoring moments I have shared with many of you.

Conversely and forthrightly, I'm looking forward to days that are less filled with a constant barrage of information and drinking from the proverbial firehose.

Happily, nearing retirement has allowed me to pause and think some bigger thoughts. I fondly recall the people and experiences that have shaped my career, formed me as I am, and enabled me to (I hope) make some small contribution to Catholic higher education. With that as the context, I hope you will indulge me as I offer ten observations, collected from my 50 years of work in higher education and ministry in the Catholic Church:

1. **Lead with love.** The Great Commandment tells us, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus not only repeated this charge, but He also lived it during His time on Earth. With Him as our model, we too must have love in our hearts — for God, yes, but for one another as well. A desire to see those around us succeed and to see our institutions thrive is our mandate as leaders.



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2. **Listen, encounter, and dialogue with others.** In *Veritatis Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls us to "a culture of encounter" with others, believers and non-believers alike. He wrote of the "reciprocal exchange of the gifts of each in that luminous space opened up by God's love for all his creatures." It is only by entering into authentic exchange with others, always modeling civility, that we can enter that luminous space.

3. **Solve problems both small and epochal.** We are all confronted with challenges big and small. We can't solve them all. And there are times when this one or that is not solvable YET. But the motto of my high school, Chaminade-Madonna, has remained front and center in my thoughts: "Toward a Better World." We can't do it all at once. Luckily, we don't have to. The Gospel message encourages us to try, try again.

4. **Inspire others to live Christian values.** Of the four principles found in Pope Saint John Paul II's guiding document, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the first calls us to be a "Christian inspiration." When visitors come onto our campuses, they should be able to see Christianity at work. They should encounter us treating one another in a way that models Gospel values. As Benedict XVI once wrote, "The one who has hope lives differently." Live your hope for all to see and others will be inspired.

5. **Never hesitate to advance faith and reason.** A core principle of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the harmony of faith seeking understanding and science purifying faith should inform our actions both inside and outside the classroom. It is not only about how we advance academic excellence for our students, but how we question and probe. The believer and educator is

Continued on page 6

Ten Lessons from a Life in Catholic Higher Education

Continued from page 5

always seeking a wise path forward, grounded in faith and based on reason.

6. **Serve all in the search for transcendence and meaning.** The last of the *Ex corde Ecclesiae* principles, this idea has always led me to focus on helping young adults find the meaning they seek from life. As Sharon Daloz Parks wrote in her seminal 2000 book, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, we need to accompany young adults on their journeys toward greater purpose. Our faith gives us the tools to begin that journey, but we must have the courage to do so intentionally. By welcoming the questions, the dreams will emerge.
7. **Radically welcome all.** On our campuses, openness to the newcomer incarnates the welcoming spirit of Christ. Welcoming those from other religious traditions or no tradition at all, and valuing them equally, demonstrates our belief that we are all children of God, created in God's image. Greet the newcomer as Christ.
8. **"Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words."** With apologies to St. Francis of Assisi, I interpret his quote to mean that Catholics should embody a distinctive lifestyle of Gospel values. We are encouraged to demonstrate our faith through our actions. As the number of religious on our campuses becomes fewer, people of faith, especially Catholics, are called to keep a Catholic worldview alive on campus.
9. **Courageously speak truth to power.** Let's begin with this hard truth: There are woefully few Catholic college presidents who take a stand in the public arena on societal issues of life and death. It's risky to use the bully pulpit to advance issues of social justice. But here is

the other truth: If Catholic university leadership does not stand up, who will? You don't have to get yourself arrested at a peaceful protest, but all of us can pen op-eds in our local paper, speak at national conferences, and meet with local lawmakers and bishops on the issues that threaten our values. We are called to do more than sit on the sidelines.

10. **Embrace wisdom.** There is truth and there are falsehoods. Yet rarely do we confront these extremes. Instead, we find ourselves living most of life in the middle, trying to assess the "gray area." The wise one knows when to advance, retreat, or reconfigure. Discernment is essential. Complicated? Yes. Optional? No. Learning when and how to embrace truth, confront falsehoods, and live in the middle is not for the faint of heart. In the end, pray for wisdom and then choose wisely.

I hope that from this list, you find three or four items that resonate, and maybe even one or two that you will return to and think about more deeply as the semester draws to a close. Me? As of July 1, I will be fishing and crabbing, reflecting and praying, gardening and carpentering, and speaking and consulting (a little). As I have shared with Pamela many times as my retirement draws closer, I will miss the relationships the most. So, if you find yourself anywhere near Deale, Maryland, please stop by. Pamela and I would love to host you at our home...where we promise good food, heartfelt conversation, and a beautiful view of the water.

Finally, thank you for all you do for Catholic higher education. Blessings!

— Michael Galligan-Stierle, Ph.D.

ABOUT UPDATE

Update is the free quarterly newsletter of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, with an international distribution to more than 6,000 electronic subscribers. Issues are published in the winter, spring, summer, and fall. Individuals may receive an automatic electronic notification of each new issue by visiting the [ACCU website](#), signing in with their personal account, and selecting "Email Subscriptions" from under the "My Account" menu.

Please note:

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