The Pilgrim’s Rule: An Invitation for Authentic Leadership and Holiness

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Description:
The Pilgrim’s Rule is an ancient rule for pilgrims but offers profound insights for how we mentor young women and men toward a life of holiness and leadership in the Christian and global community. Constant conversion, solidarity and prophetic witness is a leaven that enriches the pilgrim’s journey and sense of vocation. Inspired by one’s Franciscan charism, we are called to re-imagine the Pilgrim’s Rule as Franciscan communities of higher learning.

The Context

“We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.” (The Joy of the Gospel #8)

In the past eight years I have been teaching a course titled: “Vocation and the Arts”. It is one of the three required courses in the University of Dayton’s Chaminade Scholar Honors Program. The program began when the University received one of the eighty-eight funded Lilly Endowment Grants for Programs on the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV). Today the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE), provides a nation-wide campus-support network to expand and extend the conversation about vocational exploration.
At the heart of the University of Dayton’s Chaminade Scholar Honors Program are three required courses: **The Christian Tradition of Prayer** (Sophomore Year), **Vocation and the Arts** (Junior Year) and **Christianity, Citizenship and Society** (Senior Year). While the program is more than these courses, they are the foundation for generating dialogue and contemplation for students discerning their calling and vocation in life. We strive to mentor our students with an understanding that vocation is not only about “me” and my personal fulfillment, but about “us” and the common good.”

It is not simply about the kind of work we do but about “reordering priorities and creating a more balanced life.” (Neafsey. P.3)

The metaphor and components of the pilgrimage offers a foundation and framework for contemplating and navigating young women and men along the way. As we know, a pilgrimage is comprised of an over-arching itinerary: preparation, departure, travel, encounters, awakenings, conversations, solitude, conversions, transformations and arrival. The pilgrim may feel a sense of being overwhelmed by exposure to so much newness. Or, be engulfed by an awakening of past or shadow life experiences that demand attention, discernment, if not an immediate response. The pilgrim may discover that the silence and solitude of the pilgrimage frees them from the cacophony of daily noise and distractions that bombards their life and may even frighten them. Yet, there comes moments when one wants to stop in order to absorb the beauty of what one is seeing, hearing and learning along the pilgrim’s path.

One of the key dimensions of our Vocation and Arts course is a preparation for a comprehensive in-depth pilgrimage experience in Assisi and Rome, Italy. The title of
this presentation reflects some of the themes and experiences woven throughout the Vocation and Arts course. Furthermore, it reflects the continuous communication and dialogue I attempt to maintain with our Chaminade Scholar Alumni as they endeavor to realize, enhance and are challenged daily with the unfolding of their calling and vocation in a rapidly unfolding digital milieu. This is a journey we all share! The Pilgrim’s Rule is a guide!

**The Pilgrim’s Rule**

I first came across the concept of “The Pilgrim’s Rule” reading Pope Francis’ address to the Pontifical Council of Social Communications (September 2013). The Pilgrim’s Rule is an ancient rule written for those who walk with pilgrims on the pilgrim’s path. The idea offers profound insights for how we, in higher education, are to mentor young women and men toward a life of holiness and leadership in the Christian and global communities within which they live and serve. Pope Francis wrote:

“In one of his (St. Ignatius) rules he says that the person accompanying the pilgrim must walk at his or her own pace, not going on ahead or falling behind. In other words, I envisage a Church that knows how to walk with men and women along the path. The pilgrim’s rule will inspire us!”

We discover in our study of Pope Francis’ homilies, catechesis, and addresses this concept unfolding and applied to varying ecclesial contexts and ministries. There is always a direct link with the Church being on permanent mission, embracing a missionary style, fostering a missionary impulse, implementing a new evangelization, or encouraging us not to stand still but to go forth into new territory, or new social
Addressing Bishops (and I think this applies to academic leaders, educators and mentors, as well), Pope Francis writes:

“...he (bishops) will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths...”

The three ideas of “keeping their hope vibrant, unassuming and merciful presence and allowing the flock to strike out on new paths” are elements of our academic leadership roles, as we strive to initiate transformational leadership across the board. We are called to be mentors of hope and promise in a world sinking, at times, in doubt and despair. Within our Catholic institutions our students, faculty and staff need to experience vibrant hope and sense of beauty in order to navigate with a new fresh alternative perspective that will make a difference in our world.

Pope Francis encourages us never to walk alone. We can do this best he writes by practicing the art of accompaniment:

“The church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf.Ex3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.”

He continues:

“Although it sounds obvious, spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God, in whom we attain true freedom. Some people think they are free if they can avoid God; they fail to see that they remain existentially orphaned, helpless, and homeless. They cease being pilgrims and become drifters, flitting around themselves and never getting anywhere. To accompany them would be counterproductive if it became a sort of therapy supporting their self-absorption and ceased to be a pilgrimage with Christ to the Father.”
The Art of Listening along the Pilgrim’s Path

While expanding upon the meaning of the art of accompaniment along the pilgrim’s path leaders are to be familiar with “prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit” (art. 171).

“We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal.”

Henri Nouwen once shared a beautiful story about the art of listening based upon an encounter of a professor and a Zen Master around a tea ceremony. The story goes something like this. Once there was a professor who had been on a long search for answers around complex life questions that distracted him from faithfully attending to relationships and his profession. He heard about a wise Zen Master who offered enlightenment to all who sought his counsel. Upon the professor’s arrival the Zen Master invited him to join him in the traditional tea ceremony. They sat in silence as the Zen Master prepared the ritual. Once the tea was prepared the Zen Master commenced pouring the tea into the professor’s cup in silence. The professor was distracted thinking that the way the Zen Master was pouring the tea the cup would overflow. He cried out, “Stop! The cup will overflow!” The Zen Master replied: “Yes, and you are so full of all the ideas you wish to tell, or share with me you have no room to hear what I have to share with you. You must empty yourself of yourself if you will be able to
listen and gain the enlightenment you have come to seek!” The art of listening is an essential element of the Pilgrim’s Rule.

The art of deep listening enables us to be open and reverent to those we experience along the Pilgrim’s Way. It is essential to be respectful of each person’s personal pilgrimage path because there is wonder, mystery and awe beyond our comprehension. Joseph D. Doino, wrote:

“It is all so simple and clear: The Franciscan spirit is essentially and before all else a spirit of reverence. Certainly the stories of Francis in the early sources leave strong indication of this spirit...Francis expands our consciousness as we move reverentially with him from inanimate objects, such as stones, to running water, to living trees, flowers, lamps to humans, to sacraments, to angels and saints and, of course to God himself.” (Doino, p.10)

As pilgrim’s ourselves, we walk gently with others, cautious and vigilant with our judgments, not giving in ourselves to frustrations and fears, giving space for pilgrims’ and allowing themselves to be healed. Such openness to those along the way, “will teach us to be patient and compassionate with others, and to find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow.” (AE EG Article #172)

How we stand in awe and reverence before and in our daily relationships and the world prepares us for depth listening and openness to Divine and new revelations. I particularly appreciated Doino’s reference to Max Scheler, who offered a revealing insight into the virtue of reverence. He speaks of reverence as

“…the attitude through which one perceives a further dimension which the man without reverence does not see, for which he is blind: the mystery of things and the value-depth of their existence.”
Witnesses of Hope on the Pilgrim’s Path

In the final weeks of Pope Emeritus Benedict’s Papal Office, a symphony of metaphors and images rose through his prophetic challenge to re-inspire the faithful to re-discover the meaning of ‘being Catholic Christian’ in the 21st century. One of these was hope! Hope is another essential element associated with the Pilgrim’s Rule.

In Spe Salvi, Pope Benedict’s encyclical on hope, he wrote:

“Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need lights close by – people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way. Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us!” (Article#49)

Frequently we hear in Pope Francis’s addresses the need to be aware of the ordinary and hidden saints in our lives. Never should we take them for granted but be alert and aware! This is what I connect with Pope Emeritus Benedict’s reference to those who are “The true stars of our life… the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope.” These are not necessarily our administrators, professors, or those who are our professional spiritual guides. They are ordinary and hidden stars (saints) - our administrative assistants, staffs, ground workers, catering and related people that ensure our academic environments run smoothly and reflect the Catholic ethos of our academic institutions. They are beacons of hope in their own gentle way. Yes, many of these are ‘lights close by – people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way’!
Pope Benedict continues:

“We thereby strive to realize our lesser and greater hopes, to complete this or that task which is important for our onward journey, or we work towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future. Yet our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and in working for the world’s future neither tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance…It is important to know that I can continue to hope, even if in my own life, or the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for.” (#35).

Each one of us is called to be witnesses of hope and promise to the women and men who cross the thresholds of our Catholic colleges and universities. All too often we discover in our society a pervasive despair of finding meaning, purpose, and ultimate satisfaction in human existence. This is exemplified, for example, in suicide rates, drugs, over medication, violence, bullying and other such manifestations. The practice of the virtue of hope requires that we find pastoral strategies that stimulate the religious imagination of our students to not only believe in a future, their future, but to realize they have a contribution to make to humanity’s future. \(^{xv}\) We believe that God is not above us but ahead of us, summoning us to co-create the Future. “It is hope seeking understanding \(\text{(spes quarens intellectum)}\), and not simply faith seeking understanding \(\text{(fides quarens intellectum)}\), as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and others insisted.” (McBrien, p.273)\(^{xvi}\) The Pilgrim’s Rule implies that we are able to give experiential grounds for confidence in the divinely offered future, and the development of disciplined lifestyles focused on the pursuit of the vision and hope of the Christian gospel. \(^{xvii}\) (Hellwig, p.514)
In our Vocation and Arts course we endeavor to understand that each of our callings offers an opportunity to animate our gifts and talents in creative, innovative and unique ways by perceiving ourselves as artists. This is another dimension of the Pilgrim’s Rule – attentive to creating a masterpiece of our life!

Every discipline requires and includes an artistic perception and dimension. Each of us is an artist with our life. Often students enter our course with a narrow sense of the relationship of their vocation and art. Theirs is a rather a narrow traditional understanding that art belongs to artists who paint, sculpt, or, have works that are exhibited in a museum. Types of comments students articulate when initially introduced into the course are:

“I am not sure how art relates to my discipline. I can’t imagine that I will be using, or applying it in any formal manner.”

“I think art is about crafts and things. You know! It is what someone does in their free time when they don’t have anything else to do! It is a kind of hobby not a real job.”

Their attitude is quickly changed as they read, reflect and dialogue two significant documents. Grounded throughout our work in the semester are both Blessed John Paul II’s *Apostolic Letter to Artists* (1999) and Benedict XVI’s *Address to Artists* (2009). John Paul II wrote:
“Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”

The idea of our calling being one to create a masterpiece of our lives captures the imagination of my students. They are all artists! No matter their discipline of study, they are invited to nurture an artistic perspective for fully living into their future embraced and surrounded by Beauty. The concept makes a difference in discerning and living out their life journey.

Pope Benedict’s address states:

“Unfortunately, the present time is marked, not only by negative elements in the social and economic sphere, but also by a weakening of hope, by a certain lack of confidence in human relationships, which gives rise to increasing signs of resignation, aggression and despair. The world in which we live runs the risk of being altered beyond recognition because of unwise human actions which, instead of cultivating its beauty, unscrupulously exploit it resources for the advantage of a few and not infrequently disfigure the marvels of nature. What is capable of restoring enthusiasm and confidence, what can encourage the human spirit to rediscover its path, to raise its eyes to the horizon, to dream of life worthy of its vocation – if not beauty? Dear friends, as artists you know well that the experience of beauty, beauty that is authentic, not merely transient or artificial, is by no means a supplementary or secondary factor in our search for meaning and happiness; the experience of beauty...leads to a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives, liberating it from darkness, transfiguring it, making it radiant and beautiful.”

Beauty surrounds us! Beauty calls us out of ourselves! An appreciation of beauty in many of its manifestations each day liberates us from the dullness, drudgery and distractions which the world, or, particularly aspects of the digital world, may impose upon us. The world needs beauty and one of the benefits of pilgrimage is taking time to see ‘really see’ the beauty that surrounds us!
Many years ago the USCCB Catholic Communications Campaign funding the production of an inspiring video titled “Touching the Divine”. It is a series of six vignettes highlighting a variety of artists speaking about beauty through their artistic expressions. One of the vignettes is Jamey Turner who plays the glass harp. A number of years ago Turner would set up his glass harp on the streets of Alexandria, Virginia and play his glass harp. He believed that people needed beauty all around them even along a busy street! I used the vignette during a workshop at Holy Spirit Seminary in Hong Kong. They had not seen a glass harp! One young man requested that he would like to copy the video. I decided to simply give him the video instead.

Two years later I was in Bangkok, Thailand addressing the FABC-BISCOM. On the opening night the Cardinal approached me indicating there was a surprise awaiting me beyond the doors. Immediately I saw the glass harp but did not make the connection. In moments Weeraphong Thaweesak, the young man from Hong Kong, entered the room and proceeded to play the glass harp with precision. The three minute video I gave him inspired his sense of beauty and is now ‘the’ glass harpist in Asia. Later in the week I was invited to the youth prison to observe Weeraphong now teaching children (ages 6 – 18) how to appreciate and love the beauty of the glass harp and eventually take it back to their villages! Frequently Weeraphong is approached to apply his musical skill in the commercial world for profit. “This I will not accept”, he said. Weeraphong said to me: “I play the glass harp to awaken people to beauty in the world! I hope my music brings them into deeper communion with Beauty – God! Beauty! Beauty in all forms can transform the world!”
Cardinal Martini wrote:

“If we would listen to the true demands of the human heart then we must treasure every longing for beauty, wherever it is present, in order to journey with everyone in search of the Beauty that saves.

“Sharing the gift of Beauty means moreover that we must live the gratuitousness of love: charity is the Beauty that spreads out and transforms all who are touched by it.”xxv (Martini, p.52)

Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. writes:

“Looking at the world through the eyes of Francis and a Bonaventure, then, we would see a world very different from that which seems so pervasive today... We would see a world not filled with mere objects to be defined chemically and controlled for utilitarian ends....To see the world through the eyes of a Bonaventure is to revel in the presence of the beauty, truth, and goodness of each thing in the world without asking what is its market-value.” (Zachary, p.30)xxvi

Every human person is drawn to beauty. Each and every one of us can be defined as an aching need for the infinite. A thirst for God’s unending beauty! Initially some may discover the experience in a walk in the woods, a morning sunrise, a child’s smile, a field of sunflowers following the sun, or, a Mozart concerto. John Henry Newman, an intellectual and literary giant, would on occasion weep with delight as he played his violin. xxvii (Dubay, p. 17)

The Art of Listening and Seeing on the Pilgrims Path

In the mid-60’s I was missioned in Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, among the Native American People. Often it was the time I silently sat in the morning hours next to the Navajo women weaving in front of her Hogan, or Ramada, or, journeyed to one of the Native American Sacred Rituals in the desert that I deepened my appreciation for the wonder and impact of beauty surrounding me every day.
One of my first early mission assignments was to identify Navajo’s who were Catholic living within a certain geographic area of the Navajo Nation. With all the passion of young energetic women religious, I drove up to the first Hogan where a woman was weaving in front of her home. I enthusiastically approached her introducing myself. I proceeded to ask a series of Catholic census questions. She looked up at me and smiled and without saying a word invited me to sit next to her. She continued to weave but said nothing only smiled. I tried to kindle a conversation with little success. After some time, I graciously excused myself and left. I stopped by my mission mentor on the way home. She said: “So, how did it go today?” I described my experience. She replied: Well, Sister, I think you talked too much. Be patient! I want you to return to her and sit beside her and simply be present, do not speak.” I asked: “How long do I do this?” She said: “You will know when it is time.” For several weeks we continued our visit in silence. The longer I sat beside my new Navajo friend I began noticing that the voice in my head had become silent. A new consciousness emerged within me as I observed her dyeing the threads, weaving colorful patterns and senses the rhythm of her hands passing the shuttle over, behind and through the warp and weft threads of the loom weaving her artistic work into a lovely tapestry. My experience of the landscape furthermore changed over the weeks. What once was a barren desert now was a sacred space filled with diverse flora, plants and small forms animal life. In silence my awareness, unfolded into a new level of consciousness which eventually invited me into the wonder of Beauty - of God here and now.

One day my new Navajo friend opened the contemplative space we had been sharing and said: “You know, Sister, a short time ago our spirits joined. Do you remember?” Yes, I knew that moment because I was swept up with a sense of profound presence, wonder, awe
and beauty!” She then said: “So, what are those questions you wanted to ask me before?” I smiled. The questions were now inconsequential.

A Navajo healer once said:

“To walk in beauty is to live a life of inner tranquility and fulfillment. The Beauty Way enables you to tap into the good that is all around you, to peel back your layers of lost hopes, fears, and drudgery, and live your dreams again. The healer or Hataalii teaches you to call on the power of the good forces all around us, not just in the sweat lodge, but anywhere, anytime.”

The Navajo offer nine techniques to restore one to the Beauty Way:

- Dedicate your sleep to gain knowledge. Dreams can reveal a great deal about what troubles you.
- Close your eyes and you see better and hear better.
- Ceremonies can remove obstructions. And ceremonies do not have to be elaborate, just something as simple as taking time each morning to feel the dawn.
- Rise before sunrise and bathe in the coolness. It will help wash badness away, and you’ll be able to handle any situation.
- Smile about the problems you receive; they build muscle. Serendipity is around every corner and life detour.
- What’s important is not what happened, but to rebuild.
- Life is great; life is good, especially when you share it with someone.
- Teach all the time, and learn all the time.
- The final technique to restore one to the Beauty Way is prayer. When you pray long enough you will find shortcuts to the best path to take.

Beauty is reflected in every profession. We must free ourselves to see and embrace it with awe, wonder and mystery. Therefore, throughout the term students read, reflect and dialogue with a diversity of professional artists concerning their sense of vocation and discovering the deep meaning of beauty through their craft. Silence, contemplation and the art of seeing beauty has grounded them in an experience of depth perception for grasping their vocation. These encounters enable the students to critically reflect upon their own vocations illuminated by a new
perspective concerning beauty. We ponder together how they may live and witness to a holy and integrated spiritual life within secular culture, no matter their religious persuasion and always surrounded by beauty – if they only have eyes and ears to see and hear beauty pulsating through their lives.

One of the texts for our course is The Art Spirit by Robert Henri who was a leading figure of the Ashcan School of American Realism. Robert Henri was one of our early American artists and educators. As a matter of fact, he is referenced as America’s Lincoln of Art because he freed emerging young American Artists from the restrictive exhibition practices of the powerful, conservative National Academy of Design. He urged his friends and protégés to create a new, more realistic art that would speak directly to their own time and experience.

The Art Spirit is a collection of sayings, reflections and class notes from both Henri and his students. While a book without chapters is maddening for some students, particularly the engineering, science and math majors, they are mesmerized by the wisdom about the relationship of art and life that flows through the pages. Henri attempted to free his student’s imagination and creativity for seeing with fresh eyes the world around them. He desired they would be able to communicate with breadth and depth what they not only saw but experienced. He said:

“The development of the power of seeing and the power to retain in the memory that which is essential and to make record and thus test out how true the seeing and the memory have been is the way to happiness.” (Henri, p.29)
Mary Roger, one of Henri’s students, captured Henri’s insights regarding how authentic seeking in every instance can evoke the spirit of things around us!

“There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual – become clairvoyant. We reach then into reality. Such are the moments of our greatest happiness. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom...At such times there is a song going on within us, a song to which we listen. It fills us with surprise. We marvel at it. We would continue to hear it. But few are capable of holding themselves in the state of listening to their own song.” (Henri, p. 42)

What has assisted my students in capturing the wisdom and insights of Henri in our current context is by inviting artists to dialogue with them. Tom Patterson, a nationally known photographer, engages the students not only in a reflection on how he perceives his vocation of a photographer but how photography, as an art, enables one to see the world differently – to see and understand that beauty is all around us if we simply take time to stop, look and see it! His assignment for them is to use a camera lens to become more conscious of what is around them every day. They are to look for something they have never seen before because they simply did not have time to be consciously aware. They are to capture 3-4 photos and bring those which have stirred an ‘aha’, or ‘awe’ experience in their life to our class discussion. It is amazing what the students discover from ordinary photography about life! What they begin to discover about Beauty!
A Pilgrimage Experience: The Practice of Being, Listening and Seeing

The course’s capstone experience is our “Art, Culture and Spirituality Immersion Journey” in Italy. The entry point for our experience is Assisi, Italy. I need not explain to you, who are immersed in Franciscan charism, spirituality, tradition and mission, the meaning, value and impact of the experience in Assisi. Assisi offers one the sacred space to practice the spirit of contemplation, silence and the art of seeing beauty. Henry Miller said “our destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things.” To be able to recognize the place of our encounter with God and know it as if for the first time is to be twice blessed - to “be there” in all the gathered immediacy that human dwelling in the divine presence makes fully possible. St. Francis found himself returning all of his life to the Porziuncola, that tiny abandoned church down the hill from Assisi. The rolling Apennines, the red poppies in the fields, the extraordinary light of Umbria itself – all these were part of what drew him to the place. But it was ultimately a new way of seeing more than the place seen which marked Francis’ spirituality.  

xxxii (Lane, p. 8)

Being disconnected from Facebook, iPhones, iPads and the Internet is an essential component of our Assisi experience. The first twenty-four hours there are a few comments on withdrawal symptoms; but within forty-eight hours the students begin to articulate the sense of freedom from not having to be connected on demand!

One morning the students have an experience of the Symbolic Way (a contemplative experience, or way of seeing, listening and being present within the world -
The students rise promptly by 3:45 am. Before all the bright lights appeared in the Piazza of Santa Chiara, we used to position ourselves along the wall overlooking the Umbria Valley. This year we were blessed to have St. Anthony’s Guest House gardens. It is here we enter into the Symbolic Way of silence and contemplation. Assisi’s melodramatic lighting enhances the spiritual experience. The occasional whisper of a gentle breeze passing through the olive trees may be the only distraction; yet it is not a distraction, but an experience of the breath of God in motion. Being attentive to the symbolic phenomenon of darkness speaks to their inner being. As if turning on a dimmer switch, dawn gradually breaks over the valley. A magnificent symphony of light plays out before them. There are no words to express what is occurring within them. Silence, wonder, awe and beauty have embraced them.

In Fishbane’s *Sacred Attunement* he explores how the ‘raw and real are stifled by routine’. This is what the Symbolic Way Experiences strives to accomplish – break out of our daily routine and the ordinariness of how we experience the natural world. We are invited to encounter a new perspective whereby we are the human being is awakened to vaster dimensions of experience and the contingencies of existence. He writes:

“There is much to do, one thinks, and it is good to work in a settled sphere with established patterns. But the fissures happen in any case, and in unexpected ways; and then the human being is awakened, if only for the time being, to vaster dimensions of experience and the contingencies of existence. These breakthroughs of consciousness may even transform one’s life; but they are not inherently theological.

“Their power is to remind the self that the ‘merely other’ of everydayness is grounded in an Other of more exceeding depths and heights. But forgetting is
the norm. And thus it is one of the chief virtues of artistic creativity to reformulate the sounds and sights of existence, and thereby create new openings in one’s ordinary perceptions. Hereby, the daily routine of life is more intentionally ruptured, and the shapes of perception are experienced as subtended by infinite possibilities – such that our everyday consciousness is experienced as shot through with traces of transcendence. Aesthetic experience gives us these moments of reborn mindfulness on occasion; whereas artists may live more continuously in the spaces of awareness, often disconnected from ordinary perceptions. “(P. x)\textsuperscript{xxxiv}

Our Symbolic Way experience is a portal to Fishbone’s reality that I hope will last a life time in my student’s lives. Our evening theological reflection and liturgy bring the morning religious experience of wonder and beauty together.

**Silence and the Challenges of the Digital Milieu**

It is no wonder that Pope Benedict XVI’s 46\textsuperscript{th} World Day of Communications Message is entitled: “*Silence and the Word: Path of Evangelization*. The digital civilization we live in is anything but silent. It demands our attention 24/7 unless we are disciplined enough to recognize the value of free digital Sabbath moments, hours, or days. If our digital tools are consistently buzzing, singing and chanting, how can we learn the value of silence? Social Media Networking with all of its wonderful benefits needs to be held accountable to the importance of silence for connecting beauty and with deeper dimensions of our lives.

Pope Benedict XVI writes:

“Silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist. In silence, we are better able to listen to and understand ourselves; ideas come to birth and acquire depth; we understand with greater clarity what it is we want to say and what we expect from others; and we choose
how to express ourselves. By remaining silent we allow the other person to speak, to express him or herself and we avoid being tied simply to our own words and ideas without them being adequately tested.”

Walter Brueggemann’s “Sabbath as Resistance: Saying NO to the Culture Now” is a case in point:

“Such an act of resistance requires enormous intentionality and communal reinforcement amid the barrage of seductive pressures from the insatiable insistence of the market, with its intrusion into every part of our life from the family to the national budget. In our anxious society, to cite a case in point, one of the great “seductions of Pharaoh” is the fact that “soccer practice” invades the rest day…But Sabbath is not only resistance. It is alternative. It is an alternative to the demanding, chattering, pervasive presence of advertising and its great liturgical claim of professional sports that devour all our “rest time.”” The alternative on offer is the awareness and practice of the claim that we are situated on the receiving end of the gifts of God.” (P. xiv)xxxvi

The flow of communication in the digital age is largely orchestrated ‘by questions in search of answers.’ While search engines and social networks are the launching pad for our copious questions and interests, we can find ourselves bombarded with so much information that we do not have time for silence. “Silence”, Pope Benedict says, “is a precious commodity that enables us to exercise proper discernment in the face of the surcharge of stimuli and data that we receive.” Pope Benedict was not negating the gifts of our digital culture to awaken us to new insights, or expand our knowledge of the world and one another. He simply was appealing to us to be inclusive “that the call to silent reflection, something that is often more eloquent than a hasty answer and permits seekers to reach into the depths of their being and open themselves to the path toward knowledge that God has inscribed in human hearts.”
The beauty of cultivating silence which favors habits of discernment and reflection can be grasped as an important avenue for welcoming the Word into our lives. Benedict XVI summoned us to grasp the complementary nature of silence and Word, to hold them in balance to enrich the value of our communication initiatives particularly in requesting us to begin reimagining a new evangelization for the 21st century.

As Catholic academic leaders and educators, how does the Catholic university ethos foster the balance of silence and Word in nurturing our lives? How do we handle silence in our life? How do we encourage, or create moments, or spaces of authentic deep silence in our students – “to reach into the depths of their being and open them to the path toward knowledge that God has inscribed in human hearts”? What specific steps are we embracing to ensure that the value of silence has a place in speaking of a sense of vocation, or calling in life?

**The Pilgrim’s Rule in a Digital World**

A few months ago I was in the Detroit airport headed to the Vicariate of Southern Arabia. I had a three hour layover and sought a quiet spot to indulge in a new best seller book- not an e-book, even though I do possess a Kindle Fire! The location had no one around me. In a few minutes a man came talking noisily on his iPhone sitting right across the aisle from me. My space was violated with the unwelcome boisterous verbiage distracting me. So, I moved! In less than ten minutes this same man was a few seats away from me continuing his chatter. I moved a second time. Shortly he followed. I got up and said: “I am moving and please do not follow.” His reply: “I
am not following you but trying to escape the noise so I can hear and talk on the
iPhone.” iPhone chatter is disruptive, disturbing and violates one another’s space. It
interferes with creating contemplative space and time in our lives.

We are tethered to iPhone’s, tablets and digital tools 24/7. The next time you go
out to dine observe people seated around you. Notice how many are paying more
attention to their virtual world than the presence of those immediately around them. I
have noticed families hardly, or never speaking to each another because they are pre-
occupied within their own virtual universe. Even if they are not totally subjugated by
the digital tools there is a dimension of their consciousness that is vigilant to a
forthcoming vibration of an IM, Text, phone call, or new tweet. They simply are not
giving 100% of their thoughtfulness to the immediacy of family, or friends sitting right
next to them. The reality projected is: “You are important but someone more important
is trying to reach me now!”

In The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the
Digital Age (2013), Catherine Steiner-Adair writes: “The focus of the family has turned
to the glow of the screen…everyday life going through massive transformation. We all
know that deep connection with people we love means everything to us. It’s time to
look with fresh eyes and an open mind to the disconnection we are experiencing from
the extreme device dependency. It’s never too late to put down the iPad and come to
the dinner table.”

Since 1994 I have been co-directing the Caribbean School for Catholic
Communications in Trinidad, West Indies. The annual program created opportunities
for young women and men to develop basic communication skills via radio, video, journalism, media education and pastoral planning. In 2003 we proceeded to introduce computers, web design and distance learning. The students indicated there was no way in the immediate future that the islands would have access to these newer technologies. Five years later the country was wireless and everyone had cell phones. By 2013 students brought more digital technologies than we had within the school. Facebook, IM, iPhones, tweets, chats and blogs were no longer exotic or rare; rather, they were thoroughly integrated –weaved in, through and all around their lives. Everyone was ‘digitally wired or connected’. Consequently, we decided to flip our entire learning ecology with a fresh learning environment inclusive of their digital technologies.

Nevertheless, we had to ask ourselves important questions including: What were some of the implications of this increasing incorporation of digital mediation into their lives and society? Where in the past our students would spend endless hours ‘liming’ (hangout) together in the corridors, animated with a lively conversation, now they were lost in their own virtual worlds. Their eyes fixed on the moving images, headsets on, absorbed in sounds only they could hear and totally zoned out into their personal virtual reality. The loss of a sense of physical space, presence of persons around them and the immediate beauty of a breathtaking evening sunset over the Caribbean Sea were lost on them while immersed in cyberspace!

It is now obvious that a sense of presence in ‘real life’ is being fragmented into the virtual world, or experience. It is not what is around you here and now that is important but what might be lurking for you in the virtual world. What happens to our
sense, or experience of beauty in this context? Let’s return to our iPhones for an example.

It is deemed considerate if one attends a concert, play, movie theatre, conference, lecture, or religious liturgy that one turns off their iPhone. Yet, while the iPhone is off it may be set to vibrate, or buzz for when someone is trying to reach you. So, in one sense, we are not fully present to the immediate experience. We are waiting for the buzz, or vibration of an incoming message. If not, we are checking our iPhones every 2-4 minutes to verify we did not miss a tweet, IM, or text. Maybe even the battery died out and it needs recharging! It commands attention 24/7, or presence. We cater to the feeding requirements of our digital tools. This involvement is now referred to as ‘the vibration reflex syndrome’. How many times have you thought your iPhone was vibrating only to discover it had not? There is a name for this experience called – ‘the phantom vibration syndrome’. We again have to ask ourselves if we are losing our sense of ‘real presence’ to the real physical sense of space, time and people as human beings living in our current digital age. What are the implications of this loss?

Pope Benedict XVI’s 2011 45th World Communications Day message cautioned us to be more intentional, or aware of the consequences of too much digital attentiveness.

“The new technologies allow people to meet each other beyond the confines of space and of their own culture, creating in this way an entirely new world of potential friendships, this is a great opportunity, but it also requires greater attention to and awareness of possible risks. Who is my “neighbor” in this new world? Does the danger exist that we may be less present to those whom we encounter in our everyday life? Is there a risk of being more distracted because our attention is garmented and absorbed in a world “other” than the one in which we live? Do we have time to reflect critically
on our choices and to foster human relationships which are truly deep and lasting? It is important always to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives.”

Today more than ever our Catholic university faculty and staff need to explore the meaning and impact of the digital quantum shifts on humanity’s existence as a sixth or seventh sense. In Pope Francis’ 2014 World Communications Day message, he wrote:

“The speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgment, and this does not make for more balanced and proper forms of self-expression. The variety of opinions being aired can be seen as helpful, but it also enables people to barricade themselves behind sources of information which only confirm their wishes and ideas, or political and economic interests. The desire for digital connectivity can have the effect of isolating us from our neighbors, from those closest to us.”

One of my UD students addressed this issue in an essay on the Culture of Distraction within campus life. She wrote: “How can I spend more quality time with my friends, or even hear the voice of God amidst the clutter of digital tools buzzing, ringing, singing 24/7 during the day! I am held captive by a magnetic digital field that seems to attract me unintentionally into the digital universe! It is a virtual magnetic pull I cannot seem to free myself (ourselves). I (we) need freedom! I (we) need a break to reclaim my (our) ‘real life’. How can I (we) experience the beauty and sense of our vocation as artists that we address in our course when we are assaulted by a culture of constant distraction?”

Humanity 2.0 reflects how far down the path that digital technology, or the digital milieu is impacting not only what and how we engage in the world – politics, economics, education – but our relationships with one another and how we are
becoming human or post-human in the 21st century. Some researchers identify the shift as a process of becoming ‘transhumanist’, or ‘post-human’ for we are moving beyond what we fundamentally thought of, or recognized as being human. How we function as a human is (has) basically changed for a vast percentage of people – particularly the young – the digital natives! Steven Fuller points out some of the indicators for the shift:

1. The channeling of both work and play through the digital media replacing how we traditionally spend our time engaging in face-to-face communication and real presence with human beings, e.g. family and friends.
2. Computers, iPhones, iPads, Tablets and more are being introduced into children’s lives at an earlier age. These digital tools are becoming greater essential realities for their perception of time, relationships, exploration and learning.
3. Rapid expansion of ‘Second Life’ and ‘Virtual Realities’ versus engaging in a sense of personal presence of the here and now.
4. Increasing use of tolerance and demand from brain boosting drugs, silicon chips, etc. in order to be more immersed and identified within the digital culture which is evolving every picosecond.
5. The ease, with which we resort to ‘pre-emptive’ digital interventions, to prevent wars, crime, unwanted lives, and more.
6. The ease with which we trade off privacy and security for access, as in the emerging phenomenon of ‘cloud computing’ which promises to make all information available through overlapping provides – that is, multiply accessibility but also tractability.

Where does a Catholic educational leader begin? Motivation is the catalyzing ingredient for every successful innovation. (Christensen) Though innovative thinking may be innate to some, it can also be developed and strengthened through practice. This means offering your faculty time to think, discover and act out alternative futures. We know that unless they are motivated they will not embrace the challenge.
Perhaps the words of Steve Forbes may inspire us into the future: “The real source of wealth and capital in this new era is not material things. It is the human mind, the human spirit, the human imagination, and our faith in the future.”

The digital milieu is unfolding in picoseconds. The deeper question of what it means to be human in a digital civilization cannot be ignored at any level of our administration, teaching and living with and among one another. We have yet to authentically come to terms with this reality in a meaningful way. The research is currently in embryonic stages but we, as Catholic colleges and universities, cannot wait for the results. We must be critically reflective and responsive now. As the Internet and other media forms increasingly integrate with even the most mundane aspects of everyday life, in even the most remote regions of the world, and the “virtual blurs” ultimately becomes the “real”, issues need to be raised by a fresh anthropology, a Catholic theological anthropology. Why should this conversation concern us? First, as Franciscan colleges and universities, I believe, we have an obligation to diagnostically pursue the question for ensuring a human quality of life for all humanity. Why? Because we find clues for a prophetic engagement articulated in documents on Franciscan Charism in Higher Education documents. We have a moral and ethical responsibility to embrace and affirm the meaning of a fresh Catholic Theological Anthropology that affirms the dignity of the human person in a digital milieu. We cannot simply be carried away by the current trends of the technological evolution because it is the ‘in thing to do and everyone is doing it’. We have to seriously consider its long term human consequences.
Yes, the digital milieu offers both a gift and a threat to humanity. We cannot be blind to this reality! Yet, it is the new missionary territory where, as a Catholic Franciscan academic community, we are to be on ‘permanent mission’. We not only observe, study and engage in the digital milieu but participate in its formation and transformation for becoming more human, not less human! There are definite clues in the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition that can guide us into the future! We need to be imagineers within the new digital context.

Now I am definitely not against the evolution of the digital civilization, I am one of its pioneers! I am a firm believer in what it offers for expanding quality education, new methodologies, new learning landscapes and social media networking possibilities. I simply believe that today, more than ever, we need to be attentive, informed and engaged with the ethical and moral issues surrounding the deeper questions I am posing tonight. All too easily we are caught up with the rapid immediacy of new digital realities and unconsciously surrendering to the flow of the new idea without critically thinking through the ultimate ramifications for the immediate future in ten or twenty years. There could come a time when we cannot turn back because humanity crossed the threshold into becoming different human beings where a prophetic Catholic Theological Anthropology offers no meaning, insight, or direction for humanity.

Second, humans grow and change; this is one of the definitions of what it means to be human. If we are not to become lost to ourselves, losing even our knowledge about what actions are irreconcilable with Christian life, we must have some description of how what we are as Christian life online links us with the whole
Christian life together (Jana 2012). Like all humanities, theology is concerned with the question of human existence. But human existence can only be studied by human beings. The Christian “standpoint” is inevitably qualified by the conviction that God is real, that the real God is available to us, and that the real, available God is a principle of consciousness, knowledge and moral action within each one of us. For the Christian, an indeed for every religious person, our prior knowledge of ourselves as persons includes the light of faith as a “supernatural existential”. In other words, God is present in us from the beginning as the principle and the power of self-knowledge. The Christian knows himself or herself as a persona addressed by God in history, as a person touched by God’s presence called grace (O’Brien).

Pope Francis writes:

“Thanks solely to this encounter (with God’s love) which blossoms into an enriching friendship; we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.”

“Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide that, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage.” (Joy of the Gospel #8)

Once again we are reminded of our missionary task for being on ‘permanent mission’ within a digital civilization.

In *Lumen Fidei*, we read:

“At the heart of biblical faith is God’s love, his concrete concern for every person, and his plan of salvation which embraces all of humanity and all
creation, culminating in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without insight into these realities, there is no criterion for discerning what makes human life precious and unique. Man loses his place in the universe; he is cast adrift in nature, either renouncing his proper moral responsibility or else presuming to be a sort of absolute judge, endowed with an unlimited power to manipulate the world around him.” (#54)

Third, we come to a richer appreciation of the value of beauty, presence, mindfulness, contemplation and silence for the journey of becoming more human. We learn the value of emptying ourselves of ourselves, to be receptive to the movement of God’s spirit within us. We can sit in the emptiness of time and space and experience a mystical communion with God that enlightens and strengthens us for our pilgrimage through life. We come to realize that fragmentation, constant distractions do not bring us wholeness and holiness but brokenness, discomfort and dis-ease.

Yes, the Pilgrim’s Rule is a perfect metaphor for our leadership roles within Catholic academic communities as we participate in being on ‘permanent mission’. The digital milieu is an unknown landscape. It is the new place where women and men are playing out their vocations in new ways. It is here the Pilgrim’s Rule applies. We may feel overwhelmed by exposure to so much newness. There are moments when one wants to stop in order to absorb just a little of what one has learned, seen and heard along the way. Sometimes there simply seems there is not enough time to grasp the newness and beauty that surrounds us. Pope Francis encourages us:

“We do in fact witness today in the age of globalization a growing sense of disorientation and isolation; we see increasingly a loss of meaning to life, an inability to connect with a “home” and a struggle to build meaningful relationships. It is therefore important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to real a presence that listens, converses and encourages.”
We can do this best Pope Francis articulates when we practice the Art of Accompaniment which is beautifully specified in “The Joy of the Gospel”.

With or without us the digital civilization is forming a new way of being human. It is inviting new perspectives for contemplating the role and meaning of vocation. Our Catholic academic communities are called to accept the leadership challenge to consciously reflect upon these issues with a fresh faith perspective. We understand that our colleges and universities are not just a place for the transmission of knowledge, but a forum for the exploration of life’s mystery and meaning (Palmer, p.3). Eric Doyle wrote:

“Knowledge is never an end in itself; it is always subordinate to higher and nobler being. We know more in order to be more not in order to have more. Education is meant to bring a person to a greater awareness of personal dignity and uniqueness through a mutual sharing of insights and richer which everyone possesses.” (Doyle, p. 3)

Today we not only have a new perspective on the meaning of life, vocation and education, but we are raising new questions requiring fresh prophetic answers, or direction. Franciscan spirituality and theology offers higher education richer perspective on the dignity of each human person. We need to bring to the forefront of conversations with our students, their place, role, vocation, responsibility and engagement for contributing to a prophetic faith perspective for grasping the meaning of both what it means to be human in a digital civilization and the significance of understanding and living out a fresh Catholic Theological Anthropology as they engage
in the digital civilization. Conscious of the breadth and depth of your Franciscan heritage, Franciscan universities continue to draw from the richness of your charism, great thinkers, vision and ideals to meet the needs of the 21st century. The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition offers the 21st century a renewed reverence for life, nature and personhood! It brings the imaginative vision of St. Francis into contemporary times with contemporary expanding issues that can prophetically transform humanity. Francis’ trust in God and accepting the Beatitudes as a way of life offers young women and men a prophetic stance to address the challenge found in Gaudium et Spes:

“The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in anyway, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.” (Article #1)xlili

Yes, the Pilgrim’s Rule is our guide as we animate and encourage our students into their future. This evening I attempted to introduce you to some of the themes related to the objectives of my Vocation and Arts Chaminade Scholars Honors course. Ultimately I desire to stir their minds and hearts to rise up to embrace Beauty that is the source of all that is beautiful in our world. I also want them to remember -

“We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.” (The Joy of the Gospel #8)
There are three films related to the idea of ‘being a contribution’ I incorporate into my Vocation and Arts course: Radiating the Art of Possibilities with Ben Zander; Celebrate What is Right in the World and For the Love of it! with Dewitt Jones. These are excellent films for sparking a rich conversation on the topic we are discussing here.


Bonaventure, Itinerarium I,14-15, WSB II, 48-49


A glass harp (also called musical glasses, singing glasses, angelic organ) is a musical instrument made of upright wine glasses filled with varying levels of water. It is played by running moistened or chalked fingers around the rim of the glasses.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVijYCii8AQ

FABC-BISCOM is the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference – Bishops responsibility for Communications in either their Episcopal Conference, or diocese.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCVEiVczwuQ


Eventually my new Navajo friend did teach me to weave and spin. Weaving continues to offer me profound contemplative experiences in my life and transports me back to that moment in time when my consciousness was awakened to a depth and richness of Beauty.