

Lindenwood Presents New Collaborative Leadership Program to Help Gather the Lost Sheep

By: Christopher Thelen, Director of Lindenwood Retreat & Conference Center

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus responds to the indignant murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes about his association with sinners by saying:

"What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing." Luke 15:2-5

Jesus' story, at heart, demonstrates the extent of the Divine Shepherd's fidelity to humanity, that he would leave those who are already under his care and concern to bring those who are not, under it. Christ's mission to seek after the lost sheep is an important and urgent message for the contemporary Church. In 2015, a Pew Research Center study revealed the striking reality about the state of Catholicism and family life in the United States. According to the survey, 52 percent of respondents had departed from the Catholic faith at some point in their lives, and only 11 percent of those who had left have since returned to the Sacramental life of the Church. More recently, a 2016 study by The Center for Applied Research

in the Apostolate reported that 63 percent of responding youth and young adult Catholics who self-identified as no longer practicing the Catholic faith made the decision to leave it between the ages of 10 and 17. Many respondents cited the lack of scientific evidence for the existence of God as the reason why they had left.

How can the Church respond to such statistics? Lindenwood has facilitated a Collaborative Leadership workshop for a number of Catholic parishes and schools in both the Dioceses of Gary and Fort Wayne-South Bend that aims to encourage participants to respond to the challenges of their ministries with bold and, at the same time, pragmatic solutions.

At the core of our Collaborative Leadership program is the idea that the virtues of magnanimity and humility are essential character traits of those who endeavour to take on the Divine Shepherd's mandate to go and make disciples of all nations. In his book *Virtuous Leadership: An Agenda for Personal Excellence*, Alexander Havard has found that among all of the universally recognized leaders of industry, religion and politics since the 20th century, the character traits of magnanimity and humility

were their common dominant virtues. While magnanimity enables a leader to dream boldly about accomplishing great things, humility acts as a counterbalance, so as to not venture beyond one's given strengths and abilities. In other words, virtuous leaders have a keen ability to dream of a vision that places a man on the moon, for example. But a virtuous leader also understands his/her own limitations about making the vision of going to the moon a reality. Therefore, virtuous leaders cultivate the strengths and talents of others and fully empower people to use them so that which is dreamed of can become a reality. The virtuous leader does not settle for the way things are but dares to dream of what could be with the help of others, and together, something that transcends human understanding happens. That is, when leaders in the Church are transfigured into Christ's likeness, they can go out after those who are leaving the Church and prevent more people from leaving.

Lindenwood's vision is to help create leaders who will inspire people to return and to remain in the Sacramental life of the Church.



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