

“FINDING YOUR PASSION”: ENGAGING WITH GENERATION Z

Theology on Tap is an excellent initiative for young adult outreach. Begun in **1981** by Father John Cusick, and Father Jack Wall, both of the Archdiocese of **Chicago**. It has been replicated in many dioceses since. It is a simple concept. Gather young adults in an inviting setting and **engage** them on topics of interest to them, as they strive to live lives of faith in the real world. Most recently, the Cathedral Young Adults have been meeting at **Flaherty’s Bowl** in Arden Hills. A friendlier and more accommodating host, one could not imagine. We can enjoy **pizza** and an “age appropriate” beverage, all while engaging relevant issues in the life of the Church. Last month, I was privileged and delighted to be invited for the segment entitled “Grill the priest.” As in the past, I fielded many excellent questions, including one that flummoxed me— “What is divine intimacy?” I took a pass on that one! Ten minutes before the scheduled end, I asked the young adults if I could use the remaining time to **ask them** questions? They enthusiastically agreed; I was in for a surprise!

I proceeded to share my confusion over the popularity of the so-called “**gap year**,” indicating that had I asked for a year off between high school and college, my **father’s jaw** would have dropped to the floor! It simply wasn’t how things were done in my day. One **brave** young woman raised her hand and indicated that she had just finished a gap year herself. “Come on up,” I said. “I want to hear from you directly—and don’t go easy on me!” She explained that she **changed her mind** about attending a four-year college, deciding to work for a year. This gave her a greater sense of **clarity** about her **future**. Touché! Mic drop! I commended her honesty, and we all gave her a round of applause. I elaborated that my deeper issue is with those who, desiring to “experience the world” chose to **delay** their work or education. What is a study abroad program for? Even **with degree** in hand, others are in no hurry to begin working.

An enlightening (for me!) discussion followed about **work/life** balance, clearly an issue for young adults today. After the session ended, I stayed. Several asked me to elaborate on my earlier remarks regarding “finding your passion.” They essentially asked, “How do we become **passionate** about school?” And “How do we match our **passion** with our **work**?” It struck them as an **odd combination**. What I considered a straightforward concept required explanation. Their views were both fascinating and somewhat surprising, as several **well-educated** 22 or 23-year-olds shared that they did not view their “work” as relating to their **passion**. That lies elsewhere. They explained that in certain industries, the only way to receive a promotion is by **changing jobs**. Companies are disincentivized to retain them, as new hires are easily found at a lower salary. Company loyalty? Think again—it’s all but vanished with Generation Z (b. 1997-2012).

True enough, work is not always an exercise in joy! Perhaps some of you may recall a [1992 episode](#) of the hit sitcom *Cheers* in which Norm Peterson was offered a job as a taster in a brewery. He had landed, so to speak, his “dream job.” The recruiter remarks, “You’ll be tasting several varieties of beer. We’ll pay you for your time.” Norm responded, “Excuse me sir, this is going to sound like an odd question. By any chance, were you born in a manger?” He even demurred when presented with his **first paycheck**. “No, sir, I couldn’t—absolutely not...not for this!” I vividly recall receiving **my first** paycheck after ordination, feeling a similar sentiment! While humorous, it highlighted a valid point— channeling someone’s passion into their work is golden! How many can **live their passion** as their chosen path each day? I count myself **blessed** to be among that number.

Today, the Church must articulate a **cogent** and **credible** theology of work that speaks to a **new generation** in language that they understand. I agree wholeheartedly that our life is **not** our work. Our dignity rests in **who** we are, not **what** we do. Yet, work manifests the dignity that is ours, and

is a manifestation of our ability to use our God-given talents for the betterment of society and even the glorification of God. Is it possible to see that we give glory to God by means of our work? If work is **merely a means** to an end– be it to pay the rent, shop for groceries, or to save for a new car– we have missed something of its dignity. Similarly, work can **never** be an end itself. **Workaholism** is real and innately unhealthy. Contrary to the communist mindset, work exists for man, not man for work.

Pope St. John Paul II wrote eloquently about work. “Work corresponds to God’s design and will. ... Work is a primordial blessing from the Creator, an activity permitting people to realize themselves and to offer service to society.” I close by drawing your attention to **Jean-François Millet’s** 19th century pastel-laden painting entitled *The Angelus*. (see sidebar) It shows a **peasant couple** bowing their heads in prayer as the evening (6:00 p.m.) Angelus bell tolls. The artist recalled that “his grandmother, hearing the church bell ringing while we were working in the fields, always made us stop work to say the Angelus prayer for the poor departed.” It depicts an idyllic scene, wherein the faithful seek God’s blessing upon their work for yet another day. May we be graced by God so as to blend our work and leisure in a coherent synthesis of faith.

- I offer profound thanks for your **tremendous generosity** in our recent Safety and Security collection. The \$19,340 received to date will not linger in the bank. We will install additional cameras ASAP, greatly enhancing our ability to monitor the entire campus, inside and out.
- “**The 700 Club**”– no, not the Pat Robertson program on the CBN. I refer to an elite group of three sluggers [*Barry Bonds-762; Hank Aaron-755; and Babe Ruth-714) who have **700** career **Home Runs** to their credit. In his 22nd and final season, Saint Louis Cardinals 1B **Albert Pujols** may have become the 4th by the time you read this. Even at age 42, he still gets it done. [*Steroid use era]
- Showing one’s true colors. Pope Francis had sent feelers about a possible meeting with **Chinese President Xi**, as both were in **Kazakhstan** at the same time, though for different meetings. The Chinese government “appreciated the gesture,” but replied that there was **no free time** on Xi’s schedule. He “stood up” the Pope! Xi has **played** all his cards. There appears no meaningful sense in which China desires to collaborate with the Church on anything.
- Early reports from the Saint Paul Public Schools signal an initial 5% **decline** in enrollment, standing at 30,521. That number was 37,000 a decade ago. I am anxiously awaiting Archdiocesan report, to see if overall Catholic school enrollment **rose** again this year.
- Every detail (to the minute!) of Queen Elizabeth II’s **funeral** was **meticulously** planned and executed to perfection. Prior to her death, the Queen herself was consulted about the **design** of the State Hearse, with its glass windows. She also wanted the Canadian “Mounties” to be prominent. The Choir was stunning. Being an early riser paid huge dividends in seeing it live! *Requiescat in pace.*

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



Jean-François Millet - The Angelus
Musée d'Orsay, Paris ca. 1859