

**"PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST"**

*A commentary on life goals*

Today, it seems that people, ever more pressured by their day-to-day responsibilities and activities, seldom give time to thinking about their life goals. Many of us are predominantly focused on transient communication: cell phones, texting and e-mails, to name a few. When people do introspectively attempt to identify their individual life goals, those priorities often reflect generational differences.

A recent study reported in the American Psychological Association's "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" found that compared to Baby Boomers (born 1946-1961) at the same age, GenX'ers (born 1962-1981) and Millennials (born after 1982) considered goals related to extrinsic values (money, image, fame) more important and those related to intrinsic values (self-acceptance, affiliation, community) less important. And, concern for others (e.g., empathy for outgroups, charity donations, the importance of having a job worthwhile to society) declined slightly.

In the big scheme of things, what is really important? What should our primary life goal be? An extract from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew provides the answer. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides." [6:25-33]

How then do we seek first the Kingdom of God?

Stephen Covey, in his 1989 book "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" (listed by Time magazine as one of "The 25 Most Influential Business Management Books") identified three of the characteristics that are efficacious in achieving goals as: "Be Proactive"; "Begin with the End in Mind"; and "Put First Things First".

Many in our parish have adopted the stewardship way of life, by which we recognize that everything that is good in this world is a gift from God, that we have each received a particular and unique combination of these gifts, and that we, in gratitude, give back to God the first portion of our time, talent and treasure to help build His Kingdom.

So, to sum up, we "seek first the Kingdom of God" as our primary life goal. We strive to be effective in building His Kingdom by being proactive, by beginning with the end in mind, and by putting first things first.

We do this by sharing our gifts with others in purposeful, concrete ways to enhance the lives of the members of our families, our fellow students, our co-workers, our neighbors, the members of our parish community, and the city - all toward doing our part in advancing the Kingdom of God, whichever our own generation.

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