



Aim high!

Build relationships!

Create community!

Neumann University

Live the Truth in Love: Excellence

2017-2018

**Resources
for Reflection and Sharing on**

Excellence



During the 2017-2018 academic year, we encourage you to take time for personal and communal reflection on the value of *Excellence*.



We encourage every department to devote 15 minutes each month, as part of a regularly scheduled meeting, to reflect together on *Excellence*.

To facilitate this reflection, we have provided a booklet entitled *What Pope Francis says about Community and Unity*.

The NIFS committee has also gathered the following suggestions for reflection and sharing:



- I. Biographical readings and questions**
- II. Quotes on Excellence**
- III. Eight Keys of Excellence**
- IV. ABC's of Excellence**

I. Choose a short reading about a person who demonstrates *Excellence*. Discuss how the qualities of that person reflect and inspire *Excellence*.



- I. Pope Francis
- II. Sister Thea Bowman
- III. St. Marianne Cope OSF
- IV. Solanus Casey OFM Cap
- V. Father Mychal Judge OFM
- VI. Gabriela Mistral
- VII. Maximilian Kolbe OFM Conv
- VIII. Margaret of Cortona



Pope Francis [1927 ----]

In speaking of his election to the papacy and selection of name, Jorge Mario Bergoglio recalled the support of Brazilian Cardinal Hummes, O.F.M. “When things got a bit dangerous, he comforted me, and when the vote for me reached the two-thirds majority, a moment in which the cardinals started applauding because they had chosen a Pope, he hugged me, he kissed me and he said ‘don’t forget the poor.’ That word, the poor, lodged in me here,” Francis said, tapping his head.

In his encyclical on Care for Creation, Pope Francis recalled the spirit of his patron, St. Francis of Assisi, and held him up as an example of *Excellence* in the integration the saint lived, joining social justice issues for humanity with careful stewardship and international peacemaking.

In *Laudato Si* (para. 10) the Pope writes:

“I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”

Reflection: *How do the many gifts of St. Francis that Pope Francis identifies connect with the value of Excellence?
What gifts do you think are most critical for our world (our University) at this particular point in time?*

References

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Squires, N. (2013). Pope Francis says he chose his name because he wants a 'Church of the poor, for the poor.' *The Telegraph*.

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Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA [1937-1990]



Gifted with a brilliant mind, beautiful voice and a dynamic personality, Sister Thea Bowman, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, was the first African American woman to receive a doctorate in theology from Boston College. She shared the message of God's love in her role as gospel singer, liturgical dancer, college professor, and finally Consultant for Intercultural Awareness for the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi. Using her gifts and the short space of 53 years of life, Sister Thea gave presentations across the country; lively gatherings that combined singing, gospel preaching, prayer, and storytelling. Her programs aimed to break down racial and cultural barriers by encouraging people to communicate with one another so that they could understand other cultures and races.

Diagnosed with cancer at 52 years of age, Thea prayed “to live until I die.” Reaching across boundaries of race, culture, nationality, and status, she fought evil, especially the prejudice, suspicion, and hatred that drive people apart. In a final speech at a national conference of American bishops, Sr. Thea urged the Church to be its best: “What does it mean to be black and Catholic? It means that I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn’t frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become, I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the Church.”

Reflection: *Contemplating the words of this woman as a call to Excellence, what does she offer out of her heroic life of “living until I die”? How does her acceptance of her “whole self” speak to you about what God is calling you to in your quest for Franciscan Excellence? Sister Thea became a witness to her times by using all her gifts to bring God’s word across all lines and boundaries. How does her path to Excellence inform and inspire your understanding of personal Excellence?*

References

Borchard, T. (1990). [Let Me Live Until I Die: An Interview with Thea Bowman](#).

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Bowman, T. (2015). What does it mean to be Black and Catholic? Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6pBrBOawll>

St Marianne Cope, OSF, Mother of Molokai [1838 -1918]



Mother Marianne Cope in mid 1860s

Born in Europe in what is now Germany and brought to New York as an infant, Mother Marianne Cope (nee Kobe) spent much of her life on the island of Molokai establishing a hospital and caring for the abandoned lepers sent there to die. She responded to a letter sent by King Kalakaua himself begging for help in providing medical and spiritual resources for patients in the last stages of Hansen's disease. Her efforts brought not only sanitary conditions and hospital resources to the once primitive shelters, but a sense of home, caring, and family life to persons whose lives until that time had been little more than trying to stay alive.

In an interview in 1941, her nurse summed up the grace of Mother Marianne's coming to the island of lepers:

"It was Mother Marianne who bought the girls hair ribbons and pretty things to wear, dresses and scarves. Women keep their cottages and their rooms in the big communal houses neatly, pridefully. There are snowy bedspreads, pictures on the walls. They set their tables at meal time with taste, Mother Marianne brought that about."

"She interested the women in color harmony. Sit in services at the back of the church in Molokai and observe the lovely arrangements of color of the women. When Mother Marianne went to the island, people there had no thought for the graces of life. 'We are lepers,' they told her. 'What does it matter?' Well, she changed all that. Doctors have said that her psychology was 50 years ahead of her time."

Reflection: *Mother Marianne's form of Excellence looked into the heart of need and responded in a way that honored the dignity of each person as unique, human, and hurting. Where does this echo in your life? How have you extended yourself in this way to another? How has someone met your need in this way? How might you address the needs around you in a humanly personal way?*

Learn more about Mother Marianne in the [AFCU Journal, p. 32.](#)

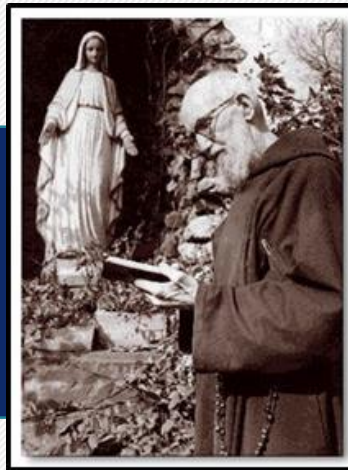
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Gadoua, R. (2011). Mother Marianne Cope's journey to sainthood: "No woman ever went out of Syracuse on a greater mission." *The Post Standard*.

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Solanus Casey, OFM Cap [1870-1957]



While his family roots were in Ireland, Solanus Casey's feet traveled the streets of New York and Detroit through most of his religious life. He worked a series of manual jobs until as a streetcar conductor, one of the first in the cities, he witnessed a woman stabbed to death by a drunken sailor. This experience led him to seek study for the priesthood, but with limited early education, Solanus struggled to learn, especially Latin and German. Recognizing the truth of his vocation, his superiors directed him first to a religious congregation and then to his ordination as a "sacerdos simplex" - a priest who can say Mass, but not publicly preach or hear confessions.

In this humble calling, Solanus found his true vocation as gatekeeper of St. Bonaventure monastery in Detroit, the greeter of the rich and poor, native and foreign visitors. His counsel, kindness and giving brought solace and peace, both physical and spiritual, to others. Many came to receive these gifts and left, at times, with miracles. Solanus will be beatified in Detroit at Ford Field on 18 November 2017.

The road to sainthood for Fr. Solanus Casey was paved with 87 years of giving. As he lay dying, Fr. Solanus said to Fr. Gerald Walker, "I looked on my whole life as giving, and I want to give until there is nothing left of me to give. So I prayed that, when I come to die, I might be perfectly conscious, so that with a deliberate act I can give my last breath to God," and so he was.

The way of *Excellence* practiced by Solanus Casey is different from many of the more notable saints, more like St. Therese's little way. Its power lies in his daily conviction of God's goodness and his desire to share all that he had and was with others. A theme that weaves through his life is captured in one of his frequent sayings, "Let us foster confidence in God, and thank Him ahead of time for whatever he chooses to send us."

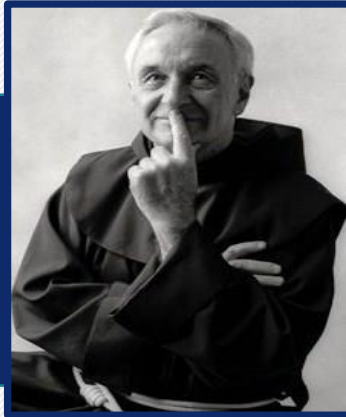
Reflection: *Sometimes, as with Solanus, Excellence comes not because of natural giftedness or benefits, but in spite of them. How can we be called to Excellence through what we discover we lack? How in a life answering a door, or its equivalent, can Excellence be found? Can you think of any examples of this kind of backdoor Excellence in your own life or the life of someone you know?*

References

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Father Mychal Judge, OFM, F.D.N.Y. Chaplain [1933 - September 11, 2001]



The first recorded casualty of 9/11 was Franciscan Friar Mychal Judge. Minutes before he ran into the North Tower of the New York Trade Center, Father Mychal Judge heard the crash and explosion of the plane that hit the tower and the fire signals calling his men to come and take part. His men were the New York firefighters with whom he had served as chaplain since 1992.

Father Mychal was known as a big Irish American man who spoke and prayed with, cared about, and ministered to those on the fringes of society. He worked among the homeless, the forgotten, street people, AIDS sufferers, addicts, and exiles of every sort. His brothers in the friary, his people on the street, his family and his friends all knew that Mychal Judge died as he lived. As he rushed forward in the lobby of the North Tower to anoint one of the victims of the first crash, the second plane exploded in the South Tower sending shrapnel and exploding the windows onto the priest. An iconic photo shows Father Judge carried out by five men. More than 3000 attended his funeral, from the Cardinal Archbishop and his provincial to political figures such as the Clintons, to the poor, disabled and disenfranchised he loved so much.

In terms of *Excellence*, Father Mychal Judge is well known for his prediction of how “great and wonderful” things happen when persons work with God. His famous quote states: “The wonderful thing is saying yes and accepting God’s grace. We could say no and walk away. But when we say yes and go forward, great and wonderful things will happen. It takes courage in the midst of fear, but you do it with the grace of God.”

Reflection: *Excellence to Mychal Judge meant allowing God’s grace to come alive in our lives. He speaks of saying “yes” to God. In your life what has saying “Yes” meant to you? How do you see it as an opening to Excellence? Mychal Judge faced many challenges and knew the importance of courage. How has this attitude been a part of your life?*

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Hagerty, B. B. (2011). Memories of Sept 11’s first recorded casualty endure. *All Things Considered*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2011/09/05/140154885/memories-of-sept-11s-first-casualty-burn-bright>



Gabriela Mistral, first Latin American Nobel Poet, [1889-1957]

The first Latin American to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, Gabriela Mistral began her working life as a rural schoolteacher in the Andes at a very early age. Over the course of her career as an educator she directed school systems in various countries and went on to serve as consul to different nations and a representative to the League of Nations and eventually the United Nations, using her positions to speak for those who were mistreated by society: children, women, Native Americans, Jews, war victims, workers, and the poor.

However, Mistral was most known for her poetry, rich in image and tortuous lines. The foundation for much of her writing was her love for the Franciscan tradition - from her love for creation to her deep respect for each person, especially the least valued. Throughout her life, she lived a mystical search for the divine in the spirit of the poor man of Assisi. At the time of her deepest conversion, she became a member of the Secular Franciscans. Much of her poetry reflects the values of her Franciscan tradition.

Reflection: *As this excerpt from her poetry evidences, Mistral's commitment to Franciscan values inspired her dedication to beauty, nature, and to service. Her devotion to these values reveals her search for the divine in her world. How does this speak to your sense of Excellence? How do you see a search for the divine in your life? What elements of the Franciscan tradition do you see in what you do?*

References

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The Pleasure of Serving

All of nature is a yearning for service:
The cloud serves, and the wind, and the furrow.

Where there is a tree to plant, you be the one.
Where there is a mistake to undo, let it be you.

You be the one to remove the rock from the field,
The hate from human hearts,
And the difficulties from the problem.

There is joy in being wise and just,
But above all there is the beautiful,
The immense happiness of serving.

How sad the world would be if all was already done.
If there was no rosebush to plant,
No enterprise to undertake.

Do not limit yourself to easy tasks.
It's so beautiful to do what others dodge.

But don't fall prey to the error that only
Great tasks done can be counted as accomplishments.

--Gabriela Mistral

Gabriela Mistral received the 1952 Nobel Prize for Literature.
This poem is from the collection *Tala*.

Maximilian Kolbe, OFM Conv. [1889-1957]



A Franciscan friar arrested by the Nazis and sent to Auschwitz for hiding and housing Polish escapees in their monastery, Father Kolbe had already distinguished himself for his establishing of Franciscan monasteries in Nagasaki and India. In October 10, 1982, Pope John Paul II spoke the following words as part of the homily for the canonization of St. Maximilian Kolbe:

“Toward the end of July 1941, when the camp commander ordered the prisoners destined to die of starvation to fall in line, this man - Maximilian Maria Kolbe - spontaneously came forward and declared himself ready to go to death in the place of one of them. This readiness was accepted and, after more than two weeks of torment caused by starvation, Father Maximilian’s life was ended with a lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Himself a prisoner of the concentration camp, he defended an innocent man’s right to life, declaring that he was ready to go to death in the man’s place because the man was the father of a family and his life was necessary for his dear ones. . . Does not this death - faced spontaneously for the love of man - constitute a particular fulfillment of the words of Christ? Does not this death make Maximilian particularly like unto Christ - the model of all martyrs - who gives his own life on the Cross for his brethren?”

Before the witness of his death, Kolbe said: “The essence of the love of God does not lie in affections or in sweet words, but solely in the will. If the soul perseveres decisively with its will fixed on holiness and love of God, although it does not experience the least feeling in its heart, let it be wholly convinced that it continually tends with rapid pace forward and ever pushes upward. Do not forget that holiness consists not in extraordinary actions, but in performing your duties towards God, yourself, and others well.”

Reflection: *While we probably will never be called upon to “lay down our life for our friend,” we can be asked to stretch ourselves to do more. In what ways have you been called to “tend . . . forward” and “push upward”? What was your response? What helped you to make the decision to do the extraordinary-ordinary act? What convictions supported your decision? What might have made you less likely to do so?*

References

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John Paul II. (1982). Homily at the canonization of St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe. Retrieved from <http://www.theworkofgod.org/Saints/Lives/MaxKolbe.htm>

Margaret of Cortona [1247 - 1297]



Identified in Church history as the “second Magdalene,” like her predecessor, Saint Margaret of Cortona became the mistress of a young nobleman when she was only 13 or 14. Margaret hoped that her lover would marry her at some point, especially after she gave birth to a son. However, that was never to happen. After nine years of living with him, she discovered his murdered body in the forest around his estate. Following this, Margaret fled to Cortona and to the Franciscan friars who had a reputation for helping the abandoned and desperate.

The friars found Margaret a home, her son a school in which he thrived, and two friars to direct her spiritually and support her in the care of her son. Eventually Margaret became a member of the Third Order of St Francis and her son, a friar. It is said that she, dreading all through her life the terrible fate of her unrepentant lover, became a faithful penitent of the suffering souls and on her deathbed had the vision of all the souls she on earth had suffered to save. Today, she is recognized as the patron of single mothers, as well as many others on the margins: the falsely accused, homeless, mentally ill, orphaned, midwives, penitents, reformed prostitutes, stepchildren, and tramps.

It is said that the Friars delayed to give Margaret the habit of the Third Order because they doubted her constancy, and also because they thought her too attractive and too young. In time, they saw that her youth and beauty were second to her saintly zeal. The Friars heard her frequently entreat them, saying: “Fathers, you to whom I have been sent by our Lord, O do not doubt me! If I had to spend my life in a desert, so much do I love God, and in such a manner does the All-Powerful fortify me, that I would never yield to creature or temptation by my hope in the Lord, Whose grace has drawn me to Him. O Fathers, you have seen me flee the world, and live only with pious people; you have seen me reform my life by the grace of Jesus Christ. Why are you yet afraid? Why do you delay to clothe me in the garments of religion?” At length, touched by these words, the Friars gave Margaret the habit of the Third Order as only right for one who had already been clothed with Christ’s grace.

Reflection: *Margaret came from a life as a careless and spoiled youngster to one of care for her son and her own soul. She became a religious strong in God’s eyes and a valiant woman to God’s people. What does her personal conversion say to you about the path of Excellence? How do you think her position of patron of single mothers and other marginalized women speaks to Excellence in the Franciscan tradition?*

References

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Saint of the Day. Margaret of Cortona. Retrieved from <http://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/saint-margaret-of-cortona.html>

II. Locate and share a quote related to *Excellence*.



Invite each person to share what the quote means personally and what it means for Neumann University.

Quotes are included on the next two pages or choose a quote of your own.

Quotes



“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

“We should not judge people by their peak of excellence; but by the distance they have traveled from the point where they started.”

— Henry Ward Beecher

“People of excellence go the extra mile to do what's right.”

— Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.” — Aristotle

Quotes



"Life's like a play: it's not the length, but the excellence of the acting that matters."
— Lucius Annaeus Seneca

"The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor." — Vince Lombardi

"Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence."
— Vince Lombardi

"The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential...
these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence."
— Confucius

III. *Eight Keys of Excellence*



Visit the website http://8keys.org/8keys_defined.aspx

Choose one of the *Keys of Excellence* and discuss that element with respect to participants' personal and/or professional lives at Neumann.

Example for using one of the *Keys of Excellence*:

1st Key: *Failure leads to success—Learn from mistakes.*

View failures as feedback that provides you with the information you need to learn, grow, and succeed.

Reflection: How can respectful relationships and a strong sense of community foster an environment that encourages us to learn and grow from our mistakes?

IV. The ABC's of *Excellence*



Consider each aspect of *Excellence*

Aim high!

Build relationships!

Create community!

Discuss what that aspect means.

AIM HIGH!



We perform to the best of our ability the responsibilities entrusted to us.
Reflection: What does “the best of my ability” look like? How does the commitment to perform to the best of my ability invite me to recognize and develop my unique gifts?

Excellence is sometimes taken to mean superiority over others, but *Excellence* can also mean striving to be better than you were before, regardless of looking horizontally to see if you are better than others.

Reflection: How do these differing interpretations connect with the idea of Excellence with regard to building relationships and creating community?

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS!



We practice cooperation, rather than competition, in the quest for excellence.

Reflection: Think of an example in your own life when cooperating with others led to a better result than competition. What did you learn about the importance of building relationships?

CREATE COMMUNITY!



We foster academic achievement through a strong, teaching-learning community.

Reflection: When have you experienced a strong sense of community at Neumann, within the classroom or in your department? Briefly describe it. How did the sense of community develop? How can we continue to develop strong communities here at Neumann?

We hope that the ideas offered here have provided a good springboard for discussions on *Excellence* in your meetings and classes.

Please feel free to share with us any comments or observations from your experiences.

We also welcome any additional suggestions for sharing on *Excellence*.

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