

CELT Fall SGPP Faculty Conference
Saturday, October 1, 2022
Drawing from our Collective Wisdom
Brother Robert Smith, FSC, PhD

Good morning and thank you for that generous (and over-stated!) introduction. Let me begin by adding my own words of welcome to you all. While not an official stand in for our president, Fr. James Burns, I know he would also want me to extend his good wishes to you all. Like most of us in this space, he is a long-time student, teacher, and researcher and values the work that each of you does inside and outside the classroom.

I need to offer a kind of preliminary word of full disclosure. I know the program has me offering the “Invocation.” I think in what I want to share, I will be doing that—at least indirectly! But, I think I also kind of slid into the next part of our welcome and opening, so you might hear a bit of “intention and purpose of gathering” from me as well.

I suspect that for most of you—if not all of you—the work you engage in here at Saint Mary’s is more than a job. While what you are paid to teach a three-credit course might help defray the cost of a nice mid-winter vacation somewhere warm and sunny, we all know no one becomes wealthy—in terms of money—by teaching.

And while for most all of us, the work we do is more—much more—than a job, I want to also argue that, for most of us, it is also more than “simply” a profession—though it certainly is that. We would not hire you, and students would not stand for you, were you not, as we might say, at the top of your professional game. And, for most of you, that means being at the top of your game not only in the classroom, but—and this is our value-added times 100—in your outside professional life as well.

Here I want to go out on a limb and reflect just for a moment and say that in addition to teaching being more than a job and even more than “just” a profession, the vast majority of us also have felt, and responded to, some kind of “calling” to be an educator. Something, or perhaps someone, drew us to the field of education. Some might even speak of a vocation to education, a vocation—a felt need—to be an educator. And, to the

degree that this is true, it is there in that “calling” or in that vocation where we find our wealth, our treasure. That is where we discover the kinds of riches that, as the bible says, “the world cannot give.”

I have to say that I just love this year’s theme: “Drawing from our Collective Wisdom.” I am not sure how practical or possible it would be, but just think if we could add up the number of years of teaching represented in this room—literally, centuries, I suspect. Or the total number of courses taught over the years, or for many of us, over the decades of our professional teaching careers. Or, just imagine the cumulative number of credit hours all of us together have amassed over the years of our teaching! Literally, thousands and tens-of-thousands!

However, nothing would be more impressive and nothing is more important than the number of students we have taught, the huge numbers of learners whose lives we have touched represented by those of us gathered here today.

In the names of all those students, and in the name of this university, I say thank you! A huge, big, genuine, sincere, and hearty thank you for all you have given in all your years and in all your courses and in all your credit hours! Thank you for answering the call to be an educator however that came to you once upon a time and however it continues to come to you.

This space this morning, right here and right now, is filled-to-over-flowing with individual and collective wisdom. Never was it truer to say that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The individual wisdom in this room right now is magnified and amplified 100-times-over when folded into its collective weight and with its extraordinary richness. It is this collective wisdom that we are calling out and calling in and celebrating and honoring today!

I am thinking that most of you know that Saint Mary’s is rooted in the Lasallian and Catholic traditions. The Founder of the religious institute to which I belong, the De La Salle Christian Brothers, was John Baptist de La Salle who started a revolution of his own in France 100 years before the more commonly known French Revolution. His was a revolution of equality in education for boys of the poor and working class. For his efforts, he was named a saint in 1900 and declared the Patron Saint of Teachers in 1950.

One of the many things for which De La Salle is remembered is his list of the Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher. Wisdom was number five on his list. De La Salle never developed his thinking on these virtues. However, some 66 years after his death, Brother Agathon wrote a short treatise expounding upon these 12 virtues and I come to a close with some of his words.

Br. Agathon begins by explaining that “Wisdom is a virtue which gives us knowledge of the most exalted things through the most excellent principles so that we may act accordingly.” Later he explains a bit more: “In what, then, does the wisdom of the good teacher consist? It consists in aiding the teacher to know, love, and fulfill the exalted and infinitely precious object for which the teacher is responsible...”

For De La Salle, for good old Brother Agathon, and for us, the “most exalted thing” and the “infinitely precious object” is the student sitting in front of us. Our job, our profession, our vocation is to recognize, honor, and cherish as “infinitely precious” those who sit in front of and behind us, with us and alongside of us.

I know, I KNOW, as sure as I am standing here today—and having been a teacher myself—I KNOW that each of us who has had the honor and privilege of being in a classroom has gained our own **infinite wisdom and knowledge of the most exalted and precious of things**. Today we get to share it.

Amen and Alleluia! Let’s get to it!

Thank you very much.