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# President's Page: Reflections Upon Installation as President of the NFCPG

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## President's Page



### *Reflections Upon Installation as President of the NFCPG*

*Ezekiel 33: 7-9*

*You, Son of Man, I have appointed watchman for the House of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me. If I tell the wicked man that he shall surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked man from his ways, he (the wicked man) shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death. But if you warn the wicked man, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.*

*Romans 13: 8-10*

*Owe no debt to anyone except the debt that binds us to love one another. He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and any other commandment there may be are all summed up in this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love never does any wrong to the neighbor, hence love is the fulfillment of the law.*

*Matt 18: 15-20*

*Jesus said to His disciples: "If your brother should commit some wrong against you, go and point out his fault, but keep it between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. If he does not listen, however, summon another, so that every case may stand on the word of two or three witnesses. If he ignores them, refer it to the Church. If he*

*ignores even the Church, treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. I assure you, whatever you declare bound on earth shall be held bound in heaven, and whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be held loosed in heaven.*

*"Again I tell you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted to you by my Father in heaven, Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst."*

I was struck by the above readings from the liturgy of the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, as well as an essay in *Crisis Magazine* (July-Aug., 1987) and I shall paraphrase considerably for the latter. Not a little reflection on the above must impact upon us the mandated obligation we as Christians and Catholics have in care and concern for one another, for our communities.

Strictly speaking, it is our early biblical mandate to evangelize, a mandate with contemporary reinforcement in the solemn pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council. Having said this, discretion imposes on us an awareness—indeed a discernment—between what is often attributed to Vatican II and what Vatican II says for itself; it is apparent that discrepancy and confusion abound. We need not ascribe malice aforethought to those expounding polarized interpretations; rather each of us must accept the responsibility, repeatedly urged upon us by Pope John Paul II, to read the documents, study them. Even a brief examination of the documents makes it clear that the Church is obligating us to evangelization.

Vatican II's "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" spells out in no uncertain terms the primacy of the missionary obligation of the Church. The guiding logic, dating from the apostles, that the incarnation of Jesus Christ with His death and resurrection, is the central point of our redemption, imposes on the Church her missionary responsibility to bring these truths to everyone in order that everyone be converted to Christ. The point is repeatedly stressed that the missionary activity is *not* an option.

A quote from the document that enjoins the laity to activity merits quoting: "They should spread the faith of Christ among those with whom they are connected by social and professional ties, and this obligation is all the more urgent since so many men can only come to the Gospel and recognize Christ through lay people who are their neighbors."

Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation, "Evangelization in the Modern World", repeated the evangelization imperatives and emphasized that evangelization must begin at home. To be sure, how can I convert others unless I am at first converted? We are urged to present Christ's message without dilution and not to supplant the eschatological imperatives with a simple palliative social gospel.

John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae" reinforces these imperatives, and focuses on missionary activity which transmits the teachings of Christ as crystal clear truths, and admonishes us

not to mix these truths with the views of ideology, sociology, or politics. He states: "It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy: Christianity is inseparably both."

What has this to do with the NFCPG? Simply this: We are privileged to be members of a professional society whose philosophy, heart and soul is in accord with the Christ-centered teaching authority of the magisterium of the Church. We are all instructed through the substance of meetings such as we attended these past three days, and through our highly respected journal, *The Linacre Quarterly*, and the magisterium itself, and we must take our missionary efforts into the marketplace—into our offices, hospitals, communities, among our brothers and sisters, whether they be physicians or not. However as in other ages, our problem of evangelization may well be one of lack of fervor and thus, lack of faith.

Therefore let us begin this year by addressing our own spirituality, which may be the wellspring of increasing our faith and fervor. I shall work with the officers, especially the regional directors, to bring about development of opportunities for spiritual renewal through local guild activities, while at the same time challenging each of us to pursue our own spiritual development and growth.

— **Thomas Hughes, M.D.**  
**President, NFCPG**