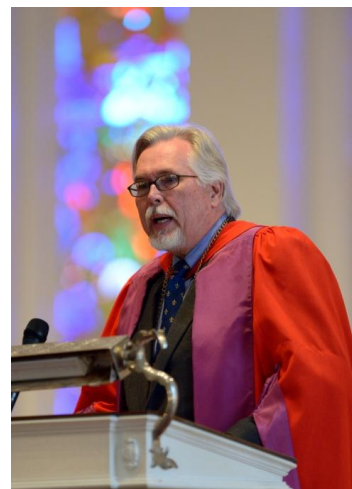




A Message from Francis
Charge to Graduating Seniors
Delivered by Rev. Dr. Michael Jenkins
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160th Commencement Exercises
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
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This year I have been particularly struck by certain messages from Pope Francis. His messages of grace, of kindness and care for the poor are profoundly at odds not only with our culture, but with our counter-culture as well.

Our culture tends to focus relentlessly on the satisfaction of “me, me, me.” It is frequently a culture of entitlement, of the self above others, a “what’s in it for me?” culture.

Our counter-culture tends to focus on “me” also, but as refracted through the objectification of “you.” Soren Kierkegaard once observed that we should be objective about ourselves and subjective about others, meaning, for him, that we should work very hard to understand others through their own skin.

In either the culture or the counterculture we often just see different manifestations of self-seeking.

Pope Francis has taken us by surprise this year because he seems genuinely more concerned about others than himself. And he acts for the other in a way that does not attract attention to himself. While that is pretty remarkable for a public figure, it is also merely Christian, and not all that remarkable at all.

Thousands, perhaps millions of ordinary human beings live decent, godly, selfless lives every day without any fanfare. But, on another level, this can be pretty rare behavior, not least for some religious people who find it necessary to dress up even the most common decency in extravagant drapery.

The key to being a great pastor is to put the needs of others before yourself. The key to being a great religious leader is to put the needs of the organization or congregation or institution before your own reputation. The key to being a great person of faith is to do what God calls you to do without taking out an ad in the newspaper to trumpet your righteousness and sense of justice.

Pope Francis says simply: “To be children of God, and brothers and sisters to one another: this is the heart of the Christian experience.”

And as good as that is, the pope's great namesake, Saint Francis said it even better in his prayer (which also is my prayer and my charge to you):

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow thy love; where there is injury, forgiveness; where there is doubt, trust; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in forgiving that we are forgiven; it is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.