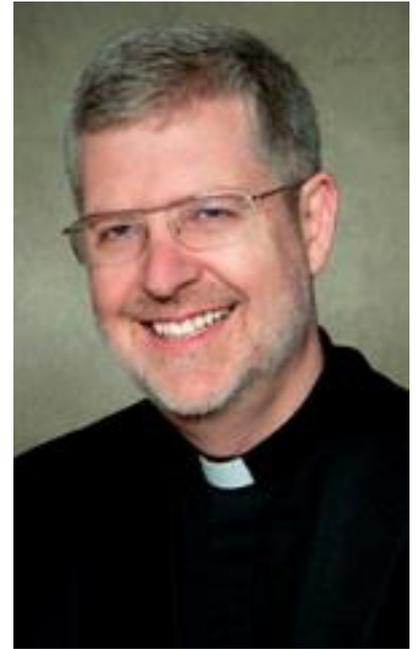


Bernardin Lecture 2016

Guest Speaker: Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, CM, EdD
President, DePaul University



The speaker for the 2016 annual Bernardin lecture was Rev. Dennis Henry Holtschneider, president of DePaul University in Chicago, native of Detroit, Michigan, and 1987 graduate of Niagara University.

Holtschneider is member of the Congregation of the Mission, an order of Catholic priests founded by St. Vincent de Paul and commonly referred to as Vincentians. The Vincentian traditions follow a path of service, inclusion, and respect that was the compelling dynamic of the life and legacy of the late Cardinal Bernardin, and the premier character attribute of the current Pope Francis. Rev. Holtschneider, coming from and living through this tradition, has given a great deal of thought to and scholarship focused on Cardinal Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life and its applications to our world.

Tuesday, Oct. 25, 2016

Lecture: 6:00 pm, Capstone Campus Room

Topic: "The Challenge of a 'Consistent Ethic' in the 2016 Election Cycle"



Holtschneider's talk discussed the continuing relevance and application of Cardinal Bernardin's theological insistence on a "Consistent Ethic of Life." In his opening remarks, President Holtschneider commented that he had done his Masters Thesis on Bernardin's "Consistent Ethic" and read everything the Cardinal had written on the subject. But for the evening lecture, he wanted to talk about how the world has changed since then and how we, in our time, can appropriate what Cardinal Bernardin left for us.

He started by talking about the value and importance of thinking about the broad range of the major issues we are facing in the world today, to care about them personally and wrestle with them. Universities, he said, by design recruit and collect independent thinkers to bring dissenting ideas into play with one another to take us down roads that make us reconsider what we walked into the discussion thinking originally. It leaves space open to continue to re-think and re-examine what we think.

Evening Lecture



Conversations in the Catholic church and around the country in the 1970s began to focus on an ethic of human life that brought together concerns for abortion with concerns for war, hunger, capital punishment, euthanasia, along with human rights and social welfare by making the case for a consistent ethical statement, “for a moral ethic that is comprehensive in scope and consistent in substance.”

Then in 1984 Bernardin raised the issue of a consistent ethic of life that grew very quickly into a public national conversation. All areas of human life are not separate issues, but multiple, interconnected aspects of the same issue – the ethical approach to life. He argued for the need to promote the attitudes and atmosphere in a society that are pre-conditions for sustaining a consistent ethic of life. As one writer at the time commented, these are simply “specific applications of love and protection for life.”

Then, Holtschneider said, in the intervening decades much changed. Powerful and compelling issues attached to the early formulation of the consistent ethic of life have moderated over time in interesting ways. The ethical issues of our world, he noted, have shifted from those Cardinal Bernardin called out in his day. But the ethical issues which

confront us today are just as critical to promoting a consistent ethic of life for our time.

Concern about nuclear war and its perceived threat to life actually declined over the decades, as the immanent danger seemed to decrease in the public mind. Capital punishment quietly and steadily became less common over the years. Currently there are very few around the country. Similarly abortion, though still a key ethical concern, has in fact been declining in the intervening decades, dropping to the lowest number since 1974. And public views regarding euthanasia have actually shifted. The rights of individuals to decide for themselves to end their lives rather than suffer the end stages of a particular disease, now has 69% popular support.



An ethic of life in today’s world, Holtschneider said, must now address a new set of ethical choices. It has to talk about the environment. Flooding, desertification, and increasing climate disasters create conditions of growing poverty and disease, increasing wars, and massive dislocation of populations. Ethical concerns must pay attention to the driving forces that generate these adversities to human life.

A consistent ethic of life must include Syria; it has to “embrace those who are literally running for their lives.” These are human lives; the human community has to respond. A consistent ethic must ask how we will think about this, how we will choose to be concerned about all of human life. An ethic of life also has to ask about immigrants. Children who have lived as Americans all or most of their lives, never knowing any home but this, are completely unable to return to a country where they know no one, or the language, or the society. These are real people, real lives. Does the human community attend to it or do we choose to look away?



An ethic of life has to ask about extension of health care to people who can’t afford it. Along with any discussions about the system, the louder voice has to be calling for health care for those who don’t even have it. And an ethic of life has to talk about street homelessness. This is all part of a consistent ethic; it is all love, the stuff of love and care for the living, caring about a world’s pain, honoring life.

Holtschneider called out our young people who “will let us know what we should pay attention to.” Black Lives Matter is a cry to stop ignoring the pain, fear, and violence, the impossibility of living and growing to adulthood on city streets for young black girls and boys. When one has

to insist that “our lives matter” they are asking for consistency in how they are treated in society. They are saying: treat us like you treat them; treat our neighborhoods like you want yours treated; give us schools you would want your children to attend; treat us equally before the law as you would want to be treated and your children treated. Anyone who takes seriously a consistent ethic of life must take their calls for consistency to heart.

Different voices over the decades called for a consistent ethic of life addressing war, abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia. Now it is for us to apply the ethic of life to the issues of our day – to bring it to bear on the concerns of our time “there is an opportunity to change hearts and build human commitment to the kind of society we want for ourselves.”