



November 6, 2020: Mind the Gap

Dear CDS Community,

What a week this has been...

On Monday night, my high school son asked me for a photo of my uncle for a school project. I believe he was doing a family tree for his Spanish class. I started the daunting task of digging into my photos and then realized that I could just search for him online. My uncle was not famous, but he was a fairly well-known priest who served the last active years of his life as the Chaplain at Stanford University. Not only did I find a few photos of him, but I also found a recording of his last homily. To have his voice speak to me from the front of the beautiful Stanford Memorial Church was at once both a shock and a comfort.

My uncle spent his favorite years serving college students and I fondly remember some of the early interactions with his students when he would bring them on trips for January term to the DC area. We were living in Northern Virginia and would host a Super Bowl dinner for the group. The experience of “hanging” with college students as a middle schooler and then as a high schooler was enough to sell me on St. Mary’s for my college decision.

My uncle, a devout Catholic, was a vocal liberal presiding over commitment ceremonies decades before it would become legal, standing up for the rights of immigrants, standing against the actions of members of the Catholic church who were unfaithful to their vows in a number of ways, and counseling women or families having to make impossible decisions in moments of health crises. He was so vocal that in his later years it impacted his leadership role in the order.

Uncle Leo was also an avid traveler and one of my great regrets was not being able to travel with him more often. I feel privileged that he was able to travel with a group of 85 friends and family to Ireland where he presided over our wedding at the Meeting of the

Waters Church in Avoca.

In his last homily, he spoke about his most memorable saying from his travels in London – “Mind the Gap” – and tied the idea of this gap to the space one arrives at when striving for perfection. He referenced a conversation with Vince Lombardi where they dove into Vince’s famous quote about perfection. “Perfection is not attainable. But if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.” His perspective was that if we know ourselves and individually constantly strive for our own perfection, we might reach excellence at moments and those moments are the very basis of our service to others. Together, we can work to bring our gifts forward to provide moments of excellence that have an impact not only on ourselves but also on all those around us.

I will note that I hesitated to share this story about my uncle in the current complex political moment, but then upon reflection I realized that, although I am not a practicing Catholic at this time, the good parts of religion are a lot of what has formed my call to service. Comfort in this duality and complexity of thought is something I am working on and I think this engagement and tension is what I need to navigate the world right now. There are no clear answers and definitive pathways. The nuances are where the joy and the pain are found, and we are all navigating those in abundance right now.

We start all of our weekly administrative meetings “shining the spotlight” on folks who have supported our work or gone above and beyond. It is a lovely way to express gratitude to colleagues and notice the work that often goes unseen. Practicing gratitude has been critical to my personal navigation of these last months. In the closing words of our Third Grade Phoenix students: Have a grateful weekend! What are you grateful for?

Perfection is not attainable. But if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.

—Vince Lombardi

Warmly,
Shelly