

Acceptance Remarks by Helen M. Alvare upon receiving the Christifideles Laici Award at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast on February 8, 2024.

Thank you so much to the organizers for this unexpected kindness. More than anything I'm grateful because it gives me a chance to be with so many friends here in this room, AND the opportunity really to **reflect** on the **whole matter** of witnessing to Christ in our times.

Given my determination to keep this to 700 words, **combined with** having loved Comedian David Letterman's Top Ten Lists...I thought I would reflect – on both the sublime and the ridiculous - in the form of a top 10 List.

So here goes...my top 10 picks under the heading: "*Wisdom I've picked up while witnessing to Christ and His Church over about 3 and ½ decades*"

Number **Ten**: When you're publicly religious, some people assume you're **saintly**, others that you're a **jerk**. Probably you're some of each, depending on the day. Don't let either opinion define you – just keep repenting, and moving toward the former.

Number **Nine**: At some point you **will** realize that God has taken every shred of talent you have, and put it to work... **Do NOT resist this**. My grade-school-career- interest-tests predicted I would be a religious, OR a professor, or a lawyer or a performer. **Close** on the first, **check** on all the rest, right? Even my love of **sewing** has got me repairing my pastor's vestments...Don't ask **why** you have such **weird-talent combos** or **what** God will do with them...just go with it. God apparently has a **way** more interesting plan for you than you have for yourself.

Number **Eight**: Words matter. You can have **all the fancy book learning** imaginable, and if you can't both **listen** to your interlocutor and provide a *succinct, truthful, reasoned* response, your communication skills need work. It's a service to the Church **and** to the watching world to **PLAN** how you will give a reason for the hope that is in you.

Number **Seven**: You will **never EVER** get bored in the service of Christ. NO other path comes **close** to being **this** bottomless and fascinating.

Number **Six**: Witnessing to Christ builds wonderful but also NECESSARY friendships. With my friends I can seamlessly talk about shoes, football, and politics, ALL against the horizon of our life in Christ. You will need this resource, ...for sanity and for the occasional kick in the rear from friends to get you back on the nice wagon.

Number **Five**: Witness matters. You **canNOT** be **the back end of a mule** and win friends for Christ. For me, this has meant, for example, removing the pro-life bumper stickers off the back of my truck until I cleaned up my driving act. (My husband used to say my *life's motto* should be "safety third.") Beingly publicly pro-life in **particular ALSO** means shelling out for a decent haircut given how critics ridicule pro-life women. As we **always** said at the Bishops' Conference pro-life office... "Bad hair is bad for the movement."

Number **Four**: Don't fool yourself that you're doing God's work just because you're working **inside** the Church. You, God, your spiritual director and your confessor know the brutal truth. Repeatedly assess yourself to make sure you are a TRUE disciple first and not just a "whited sepulchur"...or even a jerk,... see number 10 above.

Number **Three**: **Don't** arrange your career to claw your way to the top. Only a **service** mentality ultimately satisfies, and**frankly**....you may **never** get full recognition for your work if your Catholic faith is front and center. Some will **always** believe that being Catholic and being smart or capable don't mix... and you will have to learn to **live** with that.

Number **Two** It doesn't matter how many fancy degrees you have. At some point you **WILL** be at Costco at the opening bell picking up sandwiches for a Church event. What, did you think the Church was made of money??

And Number **One**, **Don't** worry about HOW many Thomas More awards you win while witnessing to Christ... you will probably NOT lose your head. Last year I got THREE, and here I am, head attached....**ever** so gratefully, ... to be with you.

So again Thank you SO much, and may God bless you!