All for the Common Good

The new branding truly captures the spirit of St. Thomas. One immediate question that will be asked is just what do we mean by the common good.

For us here at St. Thomas, our understanding is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching. The common good is one of its foundational principles and traditionally means a set of conditions in society that would permit each and every member of the community to flourish. It is as old as the prophets we find in the Old Testament and as new as Pope Francis heeding us to live out the Gospel.

But building on that, we also give it our own unique meaning. And, what, you ask, does that look like? It looks like 41,000 hours of service given annually by St. Thomas students. How impressive is that! It looks like an annual Day of Service held in conjunction with our celebration of St. Thomas Day, observed here on campus and by our alumni across the United States.

It is enshrined in our strategic plan that calls on us to further expand a culture of service at the university. There are several things that we are doing to respond to that challenge. We are developing a Center for Service that will make it much easier for students, faculty and staff to connect with volunteer and service opportunities in the community.
A very exciting initiative began in January when we welcomed the *Undertold Stories Project* to St. Thomas. Fred de Sam Lazaro whom you may know from the PBS News Hour and his assistant, Nikki See, moved to campus. They will continue their work with PBS and Religion and Ethics Weekly, and they will invite St. Thomas students and faculty to explore with them initiatives that are truly game changers in improving the social situation of people across the globe. To give you more of an introduction, please look at the monitors and watch this brief video clip.

So what does *All for the Common Good* look like at St. Thomas? On the academic side, it is service learning and a commitment to work to change our community and our world for the better. On the mission side, it is making service a priority in this university community. For us as individuals it is recognizing a connectedness to all human beings and all creation and acting responsibly to respect that connection.

I suspect that some of you may be saying, “Well, this is nothing new.” In a sense, you are right. But this is our opportunity to name it and own it and to grow it. And in doing so, we challenge ourselves to live up to the message we are giving to everyone.

You are St. Thomas. And you are all for the common good!