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A timeless mission for the new year

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Quad 136

A Timeless Mission for the New Year

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A Timeless Mission for the New Year

The New Year is often a time for resolutions and change. Individuals make commitments to self-betterment and leaders encourage their followers to bring about positive change. Pope Francis is no exception to this impulse and had a message for Catholics and others during evening prayers on New Year's Eve.

The Pope **called on the faithful ...**

...to help young people find purpose in the world, noting the paradox of “a culture that idolizes youth” and yet has made no place for the young. “We have condemned our young people to have no place in society, because we have slowly pushed them to the margins of public life, forcing them to migrate or to beg for jobs that no longer exist or fail to promise them a future.”



Image Globovision via Flickr

The Pope, of course, has **other concerns** as well but his emphasis on an explicitly macroeconomic issue is interesting. While the Pope's message is certainly meant to be universal, he is likely to be especially concerned about the situation in the EU, where he lives and sees the day to day economic challenges.

The youth unemployment data from the European Union is striking, particularly since economic

research suggests that there are significant **long-run impacts** from unemployment during an individual's earliest years in the labor market. The **data below** are from the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2014 and show the percentages of youth (ages 15-24) unemployed as a share of the total labor force.

France 23.9%

Greece 53.9%

Germany 7.6%

Italy 44.1%

Spain 57.4%

United Kingdom 16.7%

EU 25.1%

USA 14%

With the notable exception of Germany, the percentage of youth that are unemployed (this does not include those in school) is at Great Depression levels across the EU and shockingly above 50% in Spain and Greece. Furthermore, according to a **New York Times article** examining this issue specifically for college educated European youth, even “for people 25 to 30, the rates are half to two-thirds as high.”

These data are for all youth, and naturally one would expect that for the college educated, the numbers would look better, but as the *Times* article cited above notes:

There is no sign that European economies, still barely emerging from recession, are about to generate the jobs necessary to bring those Europeans into the work force soon, perhaps in their lifetimes. Dozens of interviews with young people around the Continent reveal a creeping realization that the European dream their parents enjoyed is out of reach. It is not that Europe will never recover, but that the era of recession and austerity has persisted for so long that new growth, when it comes, will be enjoyed by the next generation, leaving this one out.

The Pope's message together with these data reminded me of how blessed we are at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University to have a mission that is all about helping

young people find a purpose and meaning for their lives—both economic and spiritual. And how fortunate we are to have an economic environment that gives our students real possibilities for growth and development and for the “true inclusion” in society that Pope Francis calls for. Though the comparison is imperfect and the macroeconomics of the US and the EU are not identical, it is notable that the **unemployment rate** for the college educated in the United States in November 2016 was 2.3%.



In the *Times* article, a young Spanish woman working in the Netherlands at a menial job slowly comes to understand that “it is a sign of the plight of her generation that simply having a job and a measure of independence makes her one of the lucky ones — never mind homesickness, dashed dreams of a very different career and a gradual acceptance that her life will probably never

be the one she expected to live.”

The situation is reversed for our students.

For many students at CSB and SJU and for earlier generations of our alumni, they did and can live lives very different than those they expected—in a positive sense—because of the transformational power of their residential, liberal arts, Catholic and Benedictine experience. It is a mission that has been central to our institutions since their founding and a mission that will continue to serve us well in 2017 and beyond.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | January 5th, 2017 | Categories: [Economics](#), [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).