

## Dr. Wendler Interview with Father Robert McTeigue from The Catholic Current

- Speaker 1: This episode of The Catholic Current is brought to you by The Station of the Cross. Thank you for listening.
- Speaker 2: I have to admit, father, I don't know about you but I never got to sit at the cool kids table.
- Speaker 3: You can go to Singapore and go to a mass held in Latin and you'd feel like you were at home. The language would be the same. The music would be the same.
- Speaker 4: We understand what we're defending and the thing is, those who stand are the ones who kneel on Sunday.
- Speaker 5: Let me tell you something people, the next presidential election has no effect on your life, almost none. What has a daily effect on your life is your local school board, library board, and your town council.
- Father R. McTeigue: Praise be Jesus Christ. This is Father R. McTeigue: of the Society of Jesus, your yearly host with The Catholic Current where we bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. You're listening to us on The Station of the Cross Catholic radio network and the Eye Catholic radio app, where we proclaim the fullness of truth with clarity and charity. As always, let's start with prayer.
- Father R. McTeigue: Name of the Father, son of the Holy spirit. Almighty God, through the intercession of Saint Ignatius Loyola, we ask that you pour forth your Holy Spirit upon us, a spirit of discernment through might hear your voice and obey your command. In the name of the Father, Son and of the Holy spirit. Well, friends it is Monday. That means my weekly column is available at Aleteia. That's [aleteia.org](http://aleteia.org). Check that out. It's a Lenten reflection that I think you may find valuable.
- Father R. McTeigue: We have a very practical topic today where people are at home. They're away from school, they're thinking about what their schooling future might look like and it's advice to students. Don't borrow. Our expert guests is the president of West Texas, A&M university. He's an experienced academic and administrator, Dr. Walter Wendler:. Welcome to The Catholic Current.
- Dr. Walter Wendler: Father McTeigue, thank you so very much. I appreciate the opportunity to spend a few minutes with you this afternoon.
- Father R. McTeigue: Doctor, I'm responding to an article that you published in February and we'll link to that on our website, says a college president's advice to students, don't borrow. I'm sure that we get a lot of people caught up short and say, well, Dr. Wendler, I don't have a trust fund. I can't go to college unless I borrow. What are you talking about? Why did you write this?

Dr. Walter Wendler: What I'm talking about is that many universities, public and private are not helping students find ways to secure a college education through the traditional means, which is start as a freshman, finishes a senior four years later, in and out in four years. And the costs of attaining a bachelor's degree, whether they're schools are public or private, have gone basically through the roof. And a lot those costs are very difficult for university administrators to control but students still have freewill on their families where they can choose other courses of action.

Dr. Walter Wendler: Other ways to get a degree, to ask themselves the question whether or not they need a degree, to ask hard questions about university education and what I call the cost value proposition and as college has gotten more important, the cost and the relative value of attaining a degree has elevated also in importance.

Father R. McTeigue: Dr. Wendler, the received wisdom that you hear very often is that if you want to have any hope for a sound and comfortable future, just in terms of economics. A four-year degree is going to pay for itself inevitably because of the higher income you're going to get. Life is going to be easier because of the social respect you're going to get. And it's only four years. My experience as an academic and years as an academic and administrator is contrary to the received wisdom, if I understand you correctly. So let's start with the basics. Four years in and out. That's becoming less and less common, isn't it?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, that we're a fairly traditional regional public university at West Texas, A&M and our average age now on campus is 28 years old. When I went to school, everybody looked like me and they really did look like me. The average age was probably 21 and a half or 22 with a few people that were straggling, pushed that age up. But it was an in and out proposition. Now a lot of single parents, moms with children, people that are working and going to school at the same time, they're changing the very nature of the university and the education at the university, the opportunity that it provides. So it's changing. We can ignore it but we do so at our peril because the very best universities, the Ivy League schools and the ones that people think of when they think of high quality universities, they appeal to us with very small percentage of the population.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I mean, everybody would like to go there, but not everybody can. And we need to be mindful. I visited 132 high schools in this part of Texas, which is the Texas panhandle on the South Plains. 132 high schools and father, every time I addressed a group of students, I would tell them this, don't borrow any money for the first two years of college. There's no good reason to do it.

Dr. Walter Wendler: If you have to borrow, don't do it and go to a community college. Make sure the hours transfer and go to community college. Talk to the advisors at the university. Take the courses at a community college and don't borrow any money. If it takes four years to get a two year degree because you have to work and you have a challenge, that's fine. Do it. But don't borrow money the first

two years. And that's a message that's reasonably well received. Not so much on campus, by the way. A lot of faculty take that wrong.

Dr. Walter Wendler: Quite honestly, I tell faculty also, look, if you're willing to co-sign the notes, I will tell students that you're willing to co-sign the notes and if they want to borrow it's okay with you. We, in the academic community and I've been in a long time at a lot of different institutions, we, we don't... I don't want to say we're cavalier about it because that's not fair there. With the faculty by and large appreciate the challenges. But we have to be honest, even when it appears not to be in our best interest. I think honesty always prevails. And even if it doesn't seem like it's going. Anyway-

Father R. McTeigue: Friends, we were talking with Dr. Walter Wendler:, he's the president of West Texas A&M University. We're talking about advice to students. Don't borrow. Dr. Wendler, just to be clear, the advice of go to a community college for two years. That's to meet your core requirements that most undergraduate degrees, your math, your biology or your history, et cetera. And then you go to another school for two more years to specialize in your field. Is that correct?

Dr. Walter Wendler: That's generally the advice. And by the way, when I tell them that, I also tell them and I say this in all honesty. If the opportunities that you get for interaction and for other kinds of things on a university campus, a four year institution have a lot of value and they will not be replaced typically as a community college. It's a different kind of experience. But it's incumbent upon students and educational leaders, academic leaders like myself, to be honest with people and say, look, I think that's a great experience. But the fact of the matter is, if you can't afford it or have to go into hock, that will take you 20 years to get out of, I'm not sure the differential was worth it. So I think it's very right-

Father R. McTeigue: By the way, 20 years-

Dr. Walter Wendler: Go ahead.

Father R. McTeigue: I want to say, by 20 years to pay off a student loan is a rather modest estimate in some cases, isn't it?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Well, I'll tell you what, right now in America, I hope I get this number correct, I think I will. I'll get it right. There are approximately 1.4 million Americans and the first thing they do with their social security check is pay for a student loan. Father, I'm going to say that again. 1.4 million Americans, the first thing they do is pay for a student loan.

Dr. Walter Wendler: There's another 1.4, actually a little bit more than that, that are paying for loans for children or grandchildren. When my father-in-law told me and my dad both told me the same thing, go to college, get a degree. They would say the same thing. It guaranteed, it's going to be worth it. And they were right. But that's

when a college degree would cost eight or \$10,000. 80 or \$90,000 and I could actually make enough money while I was gone to college to pay as I went.

Dr. Walter Wendler: So that's my pitch. I'm going to call it a pitch. I have to be honest, that my plea is for people to pay as you go. Even though, you mentioned early on in the lead that you earn more over a lifetime with a college degree than without. That's true. I come from a family of trades people and I will tell you that they lead very comfortable lives and some of them may even read Schopenhauer. I mean, I can remember having conversations like that. It was not that they were narrow or naive or underprivileged intellectual wise but they were focused different. I don't think about four year baccalaureate degree guarantees happiness. I think that's a much deeper question one that the Station of the Cross knows about. I just think-

Father R. McTeigue: Well, yes, of course. We can talk about what's a greater salary. The real issue is take home pay. If Dr. Smith is getting x dollars and plumber Jones is getting y smaller dollars. The plumber Jones doesn't have four years of opportunity cost or six years or eight years and isn't putting half his take home pay into his paying off student loans. Then the net gainer is the tradesman and that's the sort of thing that we need to be talking about.

Father R. McTeigue: Friends, we're talking with Dr. Wendler of West Texas A&M University. He's the president there. And we're talking about student loans. He's urging students not to borrow. And the next segment we're going to ask a question that I've been asked very often in my academic life. Why is college so expensive? And we want to hear from you. Your questions, your concerns, your objections. Get in the line now. Call us. 1-877-511-5483. Text us with the same number, 1-877-511-5483 after the broadcast, go to [thestationofthecross.com](http://thestationofthecross.com). Get our resources list. Let's keep the conversation going. We'll be back in just two minutes. Stay with us.

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- Father R. McTeigue: Praise be Jesus Christ. This is Father R. McTeigue: of the Society of Jesus, your daily host for the Catholic Current where we bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. You're listening to us on The Station of the Cross Catholic radio network and the iCatholicRadio app where we proclaim the fullness of truth with clarity and charity.
- Father R. McTeigue: We're talking with Dr. Walter Wendler:. He's president of West Texas A&M University. He's given advice to students. Don't borrow. In this segment we're going to talk about why college education is so expensive. Dr. Wendler, we just got a message from one of our regular listeners, Tony from Utopia, Florida. He's a Physician's Assistant in family practice. His wife was trained as a high school science teacher and he said the two of them have been paying their student loans for 20 years and have another 15 left. That's not an uncommon story, sad to say. Why is college so expensive?
- Dr. Walter Wendler: Well, that's a good question. And of course there's a complex of factors. Some people blame the universities immediately for lavish facilities of all kinds. Five star dormitories that look more like resort hotels and so on, so forth. And that may be the case in very few instances but I don't think it's the case, generally.
- Dr. Walter Wendler: I think the universities are circumspect and cautious about what it is they borrow money for because when they borrow money, it's a student tuition and fees that basically pay the debt service on those loans. I mean, that's the way it works. It's just same way as if you and I borrow money. I think also, I believe that, bankers, when you think about it, if you get a college loan, basically, all you need to secure that alone is an acceptance letter from a university.
- Dr. Walter Wendler: And the fact of the matter is the lender never looks and makes judgment, a quantitative or qualitative judgment about the likelihood of the borrower's success at completing a college degree. And I think so the lenders share some responsibility in that. I believe-
- Father R. McTeigue: Dr. Wendler, I have to interject. One of the reasons that lenders are inclined not to double check on someone's ability to repay, is uncle Sam backstops it.

Someone said the reason why college is so expensive is because government has been trying to lower the cost.

Dr. Walter Wendler: Father, with a loan for a car or a house, there is fungible property that can be repossessed and sold and it still benefits the economy. Fact of the matter is when a student borrows money for degree and gets a degree that doesn't help provide them a job or any of that kind of thing, the fact of the matter is you can't give it back. Nobody can come and take it away. You've had the experience, you're paying for an experience, not a product.

Father R. McTeigue: Sure. Yes.

Dr. Walter Wendler: If I have a house loan, they can come and take the house. Banks could take the house and the fact of the matter is the banks don't care. These are very risky loans and they're not going to... If you had a bankrupt on this show next week. We're very cautious and all that. Well, [inaudible 00:17:05] but there is still no fungible property related to a college.

Father R. McTeigue: Right. I would stipulate that you can't get a student loan until you demonstrate your ability to calculate compound interest.

Dr. Walter Wendler: That could be resold or anything. It's a very unique thing but that is part of the problem. Lenders are being backstopped by the federal government because these are all federally insured wallets. And now the federal government pumps more and more into college because of elected officials. It's positive for them to suggest that more education is a good thing. But that's not always true in the cost of the... It used to be.

Dr. Walter Wendler: In 1975, Pell Grants covered 79% of the cost of college. In 2017, they covered 29% of the cost of college. So students that are getting assistance are getting less assistance for higher costs and it's a system that really needs to be looked at very carefully.

Father R. McTeigue: Well, I know in your-

Dr. Walter Wendler: It's up to the student to take control of this because nobody else will take control of it for it. And by the way, people like me should be honest about this cost value equation and look at the degree. I know other academics hate to hear me say this but it is in a sense a commodity and it's paid for and borrowed.

Father R. McTeigue: Right.

Dr. Walter Wendler: And the people that get that need to understand like Tony in Florida. I had a case, quick story, I went and spoke to Lubbock High School in Lubbock, Texas. Big high school. There were 1000 juniors and seniors. So it's not necessarily big for some standards but pretty big in this part of the world. Over 1000 kids. And

after the talk, the assistant principal came up to me and he said... And I talk about all this debt and overborrowing all that.

Dr. Walter Wendler: He said, I have to tell you a story. My wife came home last night, she didn't know you were coming to talk to us. And she told me about two physicians that came into the bank and she's a mortgage lender at a bank in Lubbock. Two physicians came in and wanted to borrow money to buy a home. And part of the American dream is a college education, buying a home and this Jeffersonian notion. I think it's sense around it and all that, all good stuff. Very good stuff.

Father R. McTeigue: Right.

Dr. Walter Wendler: But they couldn't write a loan for a home for these two physicians, one pediatrician and one a GP, a family physician. Because between the two of them they had over \$600,000 in debt. Father, something's broken, they're not getting good counts. And the idea was, probably, that people said, well, you're going to be a physician, you'll be fine. Well, they're physicians and they're not fine. They can't even buy a home. And you go back to your plumber. They can probably go out buying.

Father R. McTeigue: Right. Yes, indeed. Friends, we're talking with Dr. Walter Wendler. He's president of West Texas A&M University. The topic today is advice to students don't borrow. In this segment, we're talking about why college is so expensive. We not only have to talk about the cost of college education, we have to talk about the value. And doctor, here's what I have in mind. When I was a freshman, 40 years ago, I thought that some of the people in the classroom with me were taking remedial writing and math and I was told, oh, it's okay, they're basketball players and they bring in so much money.

Father R. McTeigue: And I suppose maybe that's true but if people who don't have academic rigor are getting college degrees, it lessens the value of everyone's degree. And education doesn't make you smart any more than putting on a basketball uniform makes you tall. Grace builds on nature. Education builds on nature too. I'm five foot eight and almost 60 years old and overweight. You could dress me up any way you want. I'm never going to play basketball competently. Even if you put a champion ring on my finger.

Father R. McTeigue: No, not at all. I think this sort of thing needs to be seen because I know when you talked about the triangle of treachery and you talk about banks and politicians and administrators. And so now the rallying cry is, hey, well, we'll just make college free for everyone. My concern with that, again, speaking to some with over 20 years in the classroom, is I've seen a steady decline in general ability and intellectual curiosity among the students. And now college, in my eyes, has become remedial high school with post adolescent spa or a four to six year play date thrown in.

Father R. McTeigue: And as a professor I'm a kill joy because I want people to work. One of the reasons I got out teaching was because I decided I no longer wanted to interrupt my lecture with the observation. This is the part where you write down what I say and people looking at me in either bewilderment or indignation. So we're clearly doing something wrong. Ultimately, is it too much to say that we may be doing something dishonest?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Well, I can't bring myself to say that but maybe a disingenuous. There might be a fine line variation because of college education can be a good thing. But it's not [crosstalk 00:23:10]to be a good thing. And that's the issue. And I know people that have studied philosophy as an undergraduate and it's been a great experience for them. And I know people that have studied engineering where it hasn't been a great experience. So it's not like one type of dictionary.

Dr. Walter Wendler: It's rather the kind of counsel and direction you get from parents. By the way, I tell students when they're making a plan, when I'm talking to high school students and they're making a plan, I tell them, talk to people that love them. Talk their parents, their school counselors, their priest, their pastors. Talk to people that love you and care about you and you share your plans with them and you ask them, is this a reasonable plan for me based on what you know about me? That's another thing people think they've got the answer. They didn't go to a college, borrow the money and everything's going to work out. That is disingenuous. It is.

Father R. McTeigue: Yes. Dr. Warner, we have a caller on the line. We have Bob from Lancaster, New York. Welcome to the Catholic Current. What's your question for us?

Bob from Lancaster NY Hi. Thank you. I was wondering if you thought that as a culture we overvalued education because I look at my friends, I look at myself, I look at my family. We have these degrees and we needed the degrees to get the job but everything we learned in the degree doesn't help us at all. And it also puts you in a box. I've got a Criminal Justice degree. It makes it very hard for me to find jobs because if it's not criminal justice related, people write me off.

Dr. Walter Wendler: Right.

Father R. McTeigue: Good question. Doctor, do you have response?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Yeah, I do have a response. I think sometimes what we overvalue, Bob is certification rather than education. I think education has tremendous value. What we've come to believe is a certificate on a wall indicates a capability of one kind or another. And father you said that this is this part when you write something down. Whatever you just said (crosstalk)... and that's the way it is sometimes.

Dr. Walter Wendler: We can make light of that. But that's a serious charge. I think, about higher education and I think we have to be very careful about that process and make

sure that the skills, critical thinking and other kinds of skills, the ability to know a little bit about history and how we fit into a larger picture and so on and so forth, western civilization. I mean, those kinds of studies are exceedingly important and they have value in the workforce.

Father R. McTeigue: Yes, of course.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I have read many accounts by CEOs about how valuable a good liberal arts education is in their business. And these are businesses. Serious business.

Father R. McTeigue: We also have to suggest that if you're 18 years old and you spent 12 years in public school and you can't add right or subtract, maybe there's something wrong with high school and you don't need higher education. But that's another topic for another time. When we come back, we're going to continue our conversation with Dr. Walter Wendler, president of West Texas A&M University. We're talking about not going into debt for college. And the next segment we're going to talk about planning for the future. How to do it.

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world to Christ. You're listening to us on The Station of the Cross Catholic radio network and the iCatholicRadio app where we proclaim the fullness of truth with clarity and charity. We're talking today with Dr. Walter Wendler, president of West Texas A&M University.

Father R. McTeigue: The topic is advice to students don't borrow. We've been talking about the high price of education, wondering aloud if it's worth it, if you decide that it is, how to plan for it. So what about that Dr. Wendler? Say, you have a young person who is academically ambitious, intellectually capable, wants to go into a field that is demanding of science, engineering and so on. You really can't learn that from YouTube videos. How do you plan for the future? What is the young person and parents need to be thinking about at this time?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Well, that's a good question, father. I would suggest that they, early on, probably in their sophomore year of high school, start to look at different kinds of colleges experiences. For example, if their fake life is important to them and they want to be a fan of the university affiliate with a particular faith tradition. They should look at that. I think, they should look at public schools. They should get a sense of their various costs associated with different university attendance and begin early, of course, save money. Some families, they do, some they don't. In this time of COVID-19, there are lots of this. There's so much anxiety about job loss and all that people have to be essentially careful. Early on we talked a little bit about community colleges.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I would still argue that for many people are no costs. When I say no cost, excuse me, no borrowing for the first two years by attending a community college could be a very wise thing for many students. The other thing I suggest. I paint a fairly dark line, a strong line on the ground and say, don't borrow. In fact, if students do need to borrow because of family circumstances and so on, and they've worked hard and planned and they still need to borrow, my advice is, excuse me. My advice is to never borrow more than 60% of the anticipated starting salary for the job you seek. So this is an example. I think I'm not used in the conversation. So if you want to teach school, grade school, in a small community and the Texas panhandle, very rural, very modest salaries, 10% or more off of state averages.

Dr. Walter Wendler: And let's say the starting salary for a third grade teacher is \$40,000. Don't borrow more than \$24,000 to attain the bachelor's degree. That's a legitimate amount of borrowing. But I will tell you, a lot of students leave to be elementary teachers and have borrowed twice that. And that's when you get the headaches back to Tony down in Florida, the physician's assistant. You have borrowed and it ends up taking 35 years of your life to get it paid off and it's just very difficult.

Father R. McTeigue: Right.

Dr. Walter Wendler: So I think planning is the key issue. I tell students all the time, don't apologize for looking at how much money you'll be able to earn with the degree. Let that be part of the bright light of reason that shines in your face when you're

thinking about whether or not this is a good investment and whatever the degree is. So when I say plan, I think that's the kind of planning that people should do. Is look at these factors and more importantly, look at alternatives.

Dr. Walter Wendler: Many young people would be well served by going to the military first. There's a lot of programs even besides the GI bill that helped people, there's a tuition assistance program in all of the armed forces where an enlisted person can earn an associate's degree while they're in the military. When you couple that with the GI bill, you have a free education plus a better of four or five or six years of service to the nation. Which for me is a nice thing. I mean, I think it's a wonderful thing anyway. So how do you plan-

Father R. McTeigue: Right. When we talk about planning for the future. One of the things that I think we need to point out is again, opportunity costs. You're effectively out of the loop for four years. If you're doing a four year degree, you've got to factor that in as well. If you want to be a contributor because you also had a nice essay we're going to link to about noble citizenship. You want to be a contributor and two great ways to contribute to society is to start a family and start a business. If you're crushed by student loans, you're going to be strongly disincentivized from starting either a family or a business and that's something that we need to look out to. I don't know if for a well served by saying college for everyone and then add the fantasy of college for everyone for free because there is no such thing as for free, ever.

Father R. McTeigue: Someone has to earn it, someone has to pay for it. Just look, if you fall for the for free argument. I would say you're automatically disqualified from higher education. Count to 20 without taking your shoes off. That's my litmus test right there. Friends, we're talking with Dr. Walter Wendler:. He's president...

Father R. McTeigue: Thank you. He's president of West Texas A&M University. We're talking about advice to students, don't borrow. In this segment, we're talking about planning for the future. So let's take a look at, if you've got some young people and they're intelligent, they're ambitious, they're not afraid of hard work and say they were like your family members who had gone before you, they had native intelligence, interested in reading great books. Nowadays, if you want to have access to great books and great courses, isn't nearly all of that as so much of it available online? Either an online course or something free on YouTube.

Father R. McTeigue: If you're simply curious, that can be cultivated in a way that doesn't take years on your life, followed by mountains of debt. And I say that as who sees education as sacred and thanks to the classroom, almost as a church. Is it time for us to say we need to get very sober, especially in light of the present crisis and make a clear eyed discernment about the merits of a college education. Is it time for that, if you will come to Jesus conversation?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Yeah. And I wouldn't have used that turn of phrase on your show but when you do it, it's a society, Jesus, guy, I'm all glad. I'm for it. But yet it is. That's exactly what's right. And this is not a sad thing by the way. And I know that there are all

kinds of reasons that people feel left out if they can't do it and so on. But that's something that we have perpetuated over time and university leadership, especially now, there are so many universities that are peddling in enrollment because they have to have the enrollment to pay the bills. And I understand, by the way, I needed to. And at West Texas University and every public university needs the enrollment and every private university needs the enrollment. But I think there's honesty about what the value of the degree is and how it works.

Dr. Walter Wendler: It's so important and critical to the people that are putting... Just very quickly, you used the turn of phrase that the school almost is like a church and there is something in that because the people that come to us, to a university, they put themselves in our hands. You go to Walmart or Costco or some other big box retailer, you don't put yourself in anybody's hands. You look at the guarantee, you read the product specs, you go to consumer reports before you buy it. There's so much clarity and all that. But a college education, somebody comes and, as a matter almost at faith, puts themselves in the hands of the university. And we have told people inappropriately that a college education is good for everybody.

Dr. Walter Wendler: It has value and sometimes it doesn't. The most challenging part of all this borrowing is there are a staggering number of people that leave college with debt and no degree. And what happens then is it creates a stream of anti-intellectualism that says, universities are bad. They've taken my money, I've got a budget that I never did finish. And then they go to their elected officials and say that and the elected officials listen and they agree. And by the way, they're right. That's absolutely correct. It's not a good thing to do. So anyway, I feel like I may be too energetic about this but I really do think it's important.

Father R. McTeigue: No, I'm in full agreement with you. I want to suggest something that was suggested to me by some of my more cynical academic colleagues. That one group that universities tend to serve especially poorly are where sometimes referred to as the scholar athletes. And the scholar athletes are very much focused on getting up and working out and doing all the things they do to achieve in sports ball. And then their coursework is not quite as demanding. And if a school is particularly dependent upon the revenues generated by sports ball or at least the promised revenues, then we start even tinkering with admissions requirements.

Father R. McTeigue: We start tinkering with academic requirements once this scholar athletes get there and then after two years, three years, they get injured or they just realize they really can't cut it at all and they drop out. So a young person's dreams have been crushed. They're in debt that they don't understand. One of the keepers of the flame going to say, maybe this isn't a good idea. How can that conversation come to pass?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Well, I'm blessed at West Texas A&M University. We have a good athletic director and he hires good coaches. As a matter of fact, our football program here, this is West Texas, we play football. A few places are more interested in

football, maybe Notre Dame but few places are more interested in football than a lot of the universities in Texas. It's part of the culture here. And when we hired the football coach, I talked with him before we hired him. The AD offered me, I stay out of it.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I'm a person that's oriented towards students without any hyphenation. I mean, it's just they're students, right? But this football coach, I told him, I said the team GPA at the time and I knew this because I've asked, was like a 2.2. And I told him till the GPA of the team gets close to 3.0, I don't care what the one loss record is. I said after the team GPA is 3.0 I'm going to pay a lot of attention to the one loss record because we have intelligent kids, you recruiting good kids and they should be able to win football games.

Father R. McTeigue: Right.

Dr. Walter Wendler: And I'm that way with all our student athletes. I don't call them scholar athletes but I'll call them student athletes. Our student athletes, generally are pretty good students but that's because the coaches expected. I'm interested to find a point on it. But our football coach who requires that the football players when in class sat in the front rows of the class and they actually go to the classes from time. I mean, we're a small university with 10,000 students but they actually go to classes to see that the football players are in there and where they're seated. They are very committed to these student athletes being good students. And they are very honest with them about what percentage of those students will likely do anything related to athletics other than coach maybe after they finished school. I mean, it's a very small percentage. I think we owe that to our students.

Father R. McTeigue: Yes, we do. Friends, when we come back. We're going to continue our conversation with Dr. Walter Wendler:. He's president of West Texas A&M University. The topic today is advice to students, don't go into debt. In the next segment, we're going to talk about the future of higher education. The higher ed is under a lot of pressure these days even more so now in light of the present crisis.

Father R. McTeigue: You don't want to miss that conversation After the broadcast today, go to [thestationofthecross.com](http://thestationofthecross.com). Get our resources list, download audio as podcast. We're available on most major platforms, Apple podcast, Google play, Spotify, Stitcher, you name it. And during the present crisis, I have a project called Preaching In the Time of Pandemic. You can find my reading of the day's gospel and the homily every day on the homepage of The Catholic Current. Check it out. We'll be back in just two minutes. Stay with us.

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Father R. McTeigue: Praise be Jesus Christ. This is Father R. McTeigue: of the Society of Jesus. Your daily host for The Catholic Current where we bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. You're listening to us on The Station of the Cross, Catholic radio network and the iCatholicRadio app where we proclaim the fullness of truth with clarity and charity. Our topic today is this, advice to students, don't borrow.

Father R. McTeigue: Our guest is Dr. Walter Wendler: of West Texas A&M University. In this segment, we want to talk, doctor, about the future of higher education. I'm not teaching full time anymore but I try to keep but keep abreast of what's happening in the industry, so to speak. I know a lot of smaller liberal arts schools are closing. A lot of schools are under strain. Some analysts say that federal dollars has blown a bubble in higher education and that the bubble is beginning to pop and with present difficulties with the pandemic that we've been told about, a lot of schools might be in deeper trouble sooner rather than later. What's your take on this?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Father you've hit a razor sharp point. In this pandemic circumstance now with COVID-19 that we find ourselves in, will heighten and in some ways heralds the questions that need to be asked about higher education. Are there too many universities? Are some so small that just can't serve themselves the way they need to? And they can't serve students. They're unsustainable business models.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I know my faculty don't like to hear me talk about the university as a business but it is a kind of business. It's not McDonald's, it's not GE.

Father R. McTeigue: Right.

Dr. Walter Wendler: But it's a business the same way a church is a business. It has to be running a business like fashion. You have to pay bills. You have to not overextend yourselves and put a burden on the shoulders of the parishioners. You just can't do it and have it be effective. And I think more and more especially, smaller

universities are going to be challenged by the economic realities of a post COVID-19 world.

Father R. McTeigue: Yeah. Now, I also want to reflect for a moment on high schoolers, doctor and get your take on it. Some say and I'm inclined to agree, that for the longest time we've been giving a pass to really inadequate high schools because it gets fixed with college bandaids. Finally, when the kids 18 or 19 years old, he's going to be taught to count to 10 and learn his alphabet.

Father R. McTeigue: If a lot of colleges aren't going to be there, if colleges become, again elite, which I think is not a dirty word, if it's understood properly and we have a real appreciation of the value of the trades, especially if the manufacturing base comes back to America now that we've learned our lesson, the hard way about that. Might we not have greater pressure put on high schools to actually perform, to give students an education and not just an attendance certificate in the form of a diploma?

Dr. Walter Wendler: Well, I wouldn't have to say yes. I agree with you. That is the challenge, I think, for the high school community. And I'll tell you as a person who has spent his whole life in public education, my adult life. I don't like to, I call it blamed down. As a matter of fact, I wrote a piece, it's on my website, it's called The Blame Game. And it has an apocryphal story about a student who's not performing well in college and this leader goes to this high school principal and the principal says, well, gosh, you ought to talk to the junior high principal and so on and so forth. It goes all the way. And they finally get to the young man's mother. And the mother says, since I don't know, you'll have to talk to his father.

Father R. McTeigue: Right.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I don't want to do that but I think you're right. And I think one of the things that the high schools can do is focus on basic, literacy and education. Numeracy, being literate, being able to reason and think critically and so on. If you graduated high school like that and that person goes out to be a carpenter, there'll be a better carpenter. I will guarantee you. All of the things, they'll be a better carpenter.

Father R. McTeigue: Of course.

Dr. Walter Wendler: I think reiterating those kinds of, I'll call them intellectual values, in high schools is very important. My wife as an example. My wife went to high school out on Long Island and also went at the same time to a trade school and became an LVN, Licensed Vocational Nurse. And she completed that and went to work at the end of high school. And I think at the time she made nearly as much as my father who happened to be a genitor in the high school we graduated from, Northport on Long Island.

- Dr. Walter Wendler: She then went on to become an RN and step by step at a way that was almost... She never borrowed any money. Didn't have to because she was working way along and so on and so forth. You talk about plans, you talk about what high schools can do and I think high schools can. The problem is vocational education is almost a dirty word. I mean, because it doesn't prepare people necessarily for college. And if people have good intellectual skills and happened to learn, get the beginnings of trade skills while they're in high schools, that can be very valuable, I think.
- Father R. McTeigue: Yes, indeed. I also want to make a pitch for the role of family in education. I think there are some families I know where the parents are so committed to turning every aspect of family life into a teachable moment, so to speak, that in a certain sense, the school they go to is almost a supplement to the primary educational venue which is the home.
- Father R. McTeigue: So if you really want to make sure that your kids are good readers, you got to start by reading with them and showing them that you have a joy and reading and you've got to teach kids how to do things, et cetera. I think all those things together, the idea that we can just shove our kids out the door and leave them in the hands of the professionals and then we don't have to think about anymore, if that were ever true. And I doubt it. It's not true now, is it?
- Dr. Walter Wendler: No, it's not true. And I remember I had an encounter with a second grade teacher. And this was a long time ago. My youngest is now 39 years. So just to give you a sense of what my age is, 39 years old, he is now. When he was in second grade, the teacher, we were talking about something and the teacher said that she felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to make sure he got a good experience in second grade. I said, I'm glad you feel that way.
- Dr. Walter Wendler: But I said that is my responsibility as a responsible parent and I will encourage him to do well in school and so on. I'm glad you feel that way but you can't take that from you. That is mine. And I put very strongly that the social unit of the family and I've gotten in trouble with this, talking about it pretty plainly and so on but I think it's still a very important unit in every aspect of a young man or young woman's wife. It's the way things are intended to be from whatever. That's what I believe and some people don't like to hear that but that's what I believe.
- Father R. McTeigue: Well, on your view, you would almost think there was an intelligent design behind it all. And if we started thinking that way, who knows what kinds of conclusions?
- Dr. Walter Wendler: Who knows.
- Father R. McTeigue: What a reasonable man might infer. Dr. Walter Wendler:, president of West at Texas A&M University, thank you for being a splendid guest. God bless you for your good work. We hope we can have you on the show again soon.

Dr. Walter Wendler: Thank you so much, McTeigue. Appreciate it.

Father R. McTeigue: This is Father R. McTeigue: of the Society of Jesus. Your host, Monday through Friday, five to 6:00 PM Eastern here in The Catholic Current. Listen to us on [thestationofthecross.com](http://thestationofthecross.com) and the iCatholicRadio app. After the broadcast today, go to [thestationofthecross.com](http://thestationofthecross.com) Get our resources list, download our audio as podcasts. Join us tomorrow and we welcome back licensed Clinical Social Worker Charles Bowers. He's a specialist in the treatment of trauma and we're going to talk about maintaining mental health in light of the present crisis. I know there are people lining up right now to be the first caller. Through the intercession of our Lady of Mount Carmel, may Almighty God bless you, Father, Son and Holy spirit. Go in peace and please pray for me.

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