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Thomas Monaghan: Spreading the 'dough'

ANGELIQUE RUHI-LÓPEZ, Special to the Florida Catholic

MIAMI — When Thomas Monaghan was younger, he dreamed of accomplishing three things: playing shortstop for the Detroit Tigers, becoming a priest and becoming an architect.

Although he never attained any of these dreams, the founder of the Domino's Pizza chain has been able to integrate into his life elements of each of these vocations.

"No matter what I did, I knew I had five priorities in life: physical and mental health, as well as the social, the spiritual and the financial. But the most important thing I could be was a good Catholic," Monaghan told members of Miami's *Agrupación Católica Universitaria* (Catholic University Association), a Jesuit-sponsored fraternal organization.

"That is my No. 1 priority. There's no compromising that," Monaghan said of his faith.

Monaghan's father died when he was 4 years old and his mother had difficulties raising her children alone. He and his brother James lived in foster care until they arrived at the St. Joseph Home for Children, a school and orphanage in Jackson, Mich.

"My father was my hero and my favorite person in the world. But I owe my faith to one of the sisters in the orphanage," Monaghan said. "When I said I wanted to be a shortstop, a

priest and an architect, and the other kids laughed, she didn't say I couldn't do it. All she said was, "Tommy, be a good boy." She was such an inspiration to me and that kind of brainwashed me."

Monaghan was never a good student, graduating last among 44 students at his high school. He was only allowed to graduate because he had good grades when he briefly enrolled in the seminary in 10th grade.

He enrolled in college, but dropped out because he could not pay for his classes. In 1956, he hitchhiked to Chicago to look for work. Finding none, he enlisted in the Marines in order to take advantage of the GI Bill and attend college for free.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I attribute my success in business to the Marine Corps," Monaghan said.

Upon conclusion of his military service in 1959, Monaghan returned to the university to study architecture, but he only remained for three weeks because he did not have enough money to pay for books.

His brother, a mailman in Ann Arbor, Mich., offered him an opportunity to be his business partner in a small pizzeria named DomiNick's Pizza. In 1960, they borrowed \$900 from the bank and opened the pizzeria.

"We had no idea what we were doing. My brother went back to being a mailman and I was left alone. When I closed the store for the night, I would have to pay the bills, make the dough, shred the cheese. That's how I became the fastest pizza maker in the world," Monaghan said with a laugh.

At first, Monaghan was also the pizza deliveryman, and during one of his deliveries to one of the women's dorms at the university in Ypsilanti, Mich., he met a young woman named Marjorie Zybach, who today is his wife of 45 years.

Despite experiencing numerous financial troubles during many of his years in the pizza business, Monaghan changed the restaurant's name to Domino's Pizza and created franchises. Today, Domino's has more than 8,000 restaurants in more than 60 countries.



LA VOZ CATÓLICA PHOTO ANGELIQUE RUHI-LOPEZ

Domino's Pizza founder and philanthropist Thomas Monaghan speaks to members of the Catholic University Association in Miami.

"The golden rule of Domino's: Treat people as you want to be treated. In 38 years of business, I never treated anyone unfairly. It was much better for people to take advantage of me than for me to take advantage of them," Monaghan said.

Though he never got to be a shortstop, Monaghan did purchase his favorite team, the Detroit Tigers, which won the World Series the year after he bought it. He owned the team for nine years.

In 1986, he wrote his autobiography, "Pizza Tiger," and is working on a second book that is "more spiritual than the last one." But Monaghan says his greatest accomplishments have come after the sale of Domino's in 1998, when he became a full-time philanthropist, donating his money to Catholic and pro-life causes. His donations helped build a mission in Honduras 25 years ago and a new cathedral in Managua, Nicaragua, after the first one was destroyed in an earthquake.

Monaghan founded the Ave Maria Foundation to work with Catholic education and media, as well as other community and charitable projects. He also founded Legatus, an organization of business leaders whose purpose is to promote the values of the church within society.

Monaghan also built a new Catholic university, Ave Maria University, in Naples. The university already has campuses in Michigan and Nicaragua. Plans call for the Naples campus to be surrounded by the town of Ave Maria, a dream that would incorporate his love of architecture.

Monaghan has been questioned about his desire to create a new Catholic university when so many are already in existence, and he has been criticized for the town of Ave Maria, since he stated that no pharmacy within the town may sell contraceptives.

"Why build this university with the limited amount of money and time that I have left?" asked the now 69-year-old father and grandfather. "I ask myself, 'What is the most valuable thing I can do with what God's given me?' I decided that the most important thing Catholics can do with their money is help other people get to heaven. It doesn't matter where they're from — Africa, Honduras, Nicaragua or Naples. The most important thing you can do is get an education. It's what the world needs most. This is important: That's why I'm dedicating my life to it," he said.

Manny García-Tuñón, vice president of sales and marketing for Lemartec Engineering and Construction Corp., said he was moved by Monaghan's speech.

"I thought it was inspirational to see someone so uncompromisingly Catholic," said García-Tuñón. "He's setting the bar higher than most Catholic organizations and dioceses. He gave me a tremendous amount of inspiration that I can live my Catholic faith in my profession."

Ruhi-Lopez writes for La Voz Católica, the Spanish-language monthly newspaper of the Archdiocese of Miami.

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