

MoeTerm represents the ultimate expression of REALearning at Moeller—a dynamic, four-day immersive experience that reimagines the traditional classroom as a vibrant hub of creativity, hands-on engagement, and personal growth. During this transformative program, students choose from more than 30 experience-based courses designed to spark curiosity and cultivate real-world skills. With opportunities both on and off campus, participants explore new interests, interact with industry professionals, and engage in meaningful reflection that deepens their understanding of each experience. At its core, MoeTerm embodies the principles of experiential learning, an approach in which students do more than absorb information—they actively live their education through participation, exploration, and thoughtful analysis. Reflection serves as the cornerstone of this process, challenging students to think critically and creatively about what they encounter and how it shapes their development. As they engage with new perspectives, students strengthen their ability to analyze, collaborate, and lead, transforming hands-on experiences into lasting knowledge that extends far beyond memorization. In addition to its academic and personal benefits, MoeTerm offers tangible rewards: students earn one-quarter credit toward their transcript while gaining a distinctive advantage in the college application process. Ultimately, MoeTerm is more than a program—it is a powerful journey that inspires curiosity, fosters growth, and equips students with the skills and mindset needed for lifelong learning.

- What are some other examples of successful MoeTerm projects?
 - MoeTerm was a big success for its inaugural run in 2026. We had many successful programs that were offered and our students' gained a lot from them in a wide variety of aspects.
 - We had a service project travel to Guatemala, and work with ImaginGuatemala to build houses for families in Antigua, Guatemala.
 - Our course, *Rock and Roll Revolution* had students building and decorating their own guitars, learning basic chords, gaining insight into the origins and evolution of rock 'n roll and touring the Brady Center.
 - *A Farm to Table* gave students the opportunity to follow the food cycle by learning all about meat. They learned about various cuts of meat, went out to Emmett Ridge Farm and learned about animal husbandry, they spent time with the butcher and then on the last day they cooked steaks at Valley Vineyards.
 - Working with the University of Cincinnati, our students learned about many different types of engineering, thus offering them the opportunity to see what career fields could be in their future.
 - Another Independent Study had a student looking into entrepreneurship and what it would take to start his own boating tour company in the Virgin Islands. Needless to say, he has realized having a partner or investors is a much needed necessity. However he developed an entire business plan that he can hopefully use and continue to build out in college.

What stood out to you most from Joseph's study?

- Having not had the opportunity to teach Joseph (as of yet,) I was blown away by his writing ability. His ability to draw complex connections between children's movies and papal encyclicals was amazing. In doing so, I was able to also learn about and make stronger connections to those holy writings, which I thought was a blessing.

What are some of the hopes/plans for MoeTerm 2027?

- MoeTerm 2027 is looking to be just as amazing as 2026. Our faculty and staff have learned how to make their MoeTerm course offerings better for their students and are continuing to grow in their craft.
- Many of our student loved courses are returning for year two!
- We are offering numerous travel opportunities for our students:
 - Give Kids the World – Service course – partnering with Give Kids the World (an organization much like the Make a Wish Foundation)
 - Ecotourism in Costa Rica

- Silicon Valley Immersion – offering our students an in-depth look at the tech boom in Silicon Valley and learning more about AI, Google, Apple and much more
- This year we are soft- launching a senior “externship” MoeTerm with the hopes of helping a small group of seniors spend time doing job/career shadowing during their MoeTerm week.
- My hope for MoeTerm 2027 is that students continue to explore and engage in topics they may not have previously considered, whether in areas such as culinary arts, engineering, service, or writing. I encourage them to embrace the opportunity to discover new interests—be it a hobby, skill, craft, or potential career path. Most importantly, I hope they strengthen the Moeller community by stepping outside their comfort zones, forming new connections, and deepening relationships with their peers, faculty, and staff.

Joseph's Answers:

1. From a student's perspective, How does MoeTerm enrich the educational experience at Moeller?
I'd say that MoeTerm enriches the educational experience at Moeller by allowing students to be better able to explore their interests without sacrificing any rigor from Moeller's normal classes. Normally a student chooses between a variety of prepared MoeTerm courses, but since I had a doctor's appointment in Delaware scheduled during the week of MoeTerm, I got to do an independent study instead. This allowed me to create my own MoeTerm experience, but it also forced me to write the essays on top of my normal workload.
2. How did you come to the idea of pairing papal encyclicals with Pixar movies?
Around my 8th grade year or so, I remember reading George Weigel's *Letters to a Young Catholic* and being quite impressed with how Weigel tied certain Catholic places together with certain aspects of a sacramental worldview in a way that a young person could understand. However, since I'm more acquainted with animated movies than globetrotting, I decided to write on that instead. The main reason why I added the encyclicals was that I wanted to have a better framework for the essays and for the essays to be better focused on just a few topics.
3. How did this project reflect your interests?
I'm rather interested in stories, and I feel that they are quite effective vehicles for transmitting ideas and doctrines. (It gets them past the "watchful dragons" of prejudice, as C.S. Lewis once said.) Thus, getting to think about how certain points in the encyclicals related to certain themes in the movies and getting to write them down in essay form was rather enjoyable (even if I had deadlines over my head while doing so).
4. How do you see your work preparing you for what you want to achieve in the future?
I plan to become an English major and hopefully an author, so these essays have trained me to write better in an analytical style similar to what an English major requires. Alongside the AP Literature class I'm taking, they have also allowed me to better probe a story for depth and meaning—and to put meaning into the stories I write.

5. What drew you to these particular encyclicals (or movies)?

I'd say that the *WALL-E/Laudato Si'* pairing was the easiest of the three—they're two pieces about the human impact of neglecting creation, and the parallels were easy for me to spot.

Puss in Boots: The Last Wish had always been a favorite movie of mine, and since the main theme of that one was about accepting death, I knew it had to be paired with an encyclical about valuing human life. The only two encyclicals like that (that I knew about at the time) were *Evangelium Vitae* and *Humanae Vitae*. I felt that the scope of *Humanae Vitae* was more limited to abortion and contraception, while *Evangelium Vitae*—the one I eventually chose—was a deeper look at the roots of the "culture of death."

The third pairing was a bit harder to piece together, as I wanted it to be different from the other two in terms of topic yet still fit the movie-encyclical mold. I considered writing an essay on *Centissimus Annus* and a movie about totalitarianism (with *Toy Story 3* being the movie I had in mind), but I wanted to honor *Rerum Novarum* with an essay, as it was the encyclical that really pushed Catholic Social Teaching into the mainstream. The two movies I had in mind to pair *Rerum* with were *A Bug's Life* and *Transformers One*, as both dealt with workers' rights without being explicitly Christian (sorry, *Prince of Egypt*). I felt that I was more familiar with *A Bug's Life* going in (as it is a Pixar movie), but looking back, I feel that *Transformers One* could have provided a deeper analysis about certain topics that *A Bug's Life* scarcely touched on.

6. How have you taken what you learned and applied it to life or put it into action?

As of now, I haven't really taken much action with what I have learned in the process of making these essays apart from trying to live a good, moral life with a richer lens. In the future, however, I hope that I'll be able to write stories and essays that will inspire people to a greater faith where it matters most.

7. What is the most exciting connection that you made in your articles?

If I had to choose one connection that I found most exciting, I'd say the analysis of Puss's motivation for chasing the Wishing Star as opposed to Big Jack Horner's motivation. That specific part of the essay was probably where I was best able to connect the movie with truths not included in the encyclical while also remaining topical to the issues I intended to analyze.

8. What was the most difficult part of the project?

The most difficult part of this project was certainly the deadlines. I am quite a proficient procrastinator, and me having to write these essays on top of the workload of three AP classes and the commitment of acting in a spring theatre production was quite the challenge. I tried to space out the essays so that I had a month to work on each, and the one on *Rerum Novarum* just so happened to fall in the period where the load was the highest.

It's a Wonderful World

WALL-E and *Laudato Si'* on Caring for Creation

In the book of Genesis, God made light and separated it from darkness; He made the sea and separated it from dry land; He made every single star in the sky and every live-giving plant on the ground. Looking at what He had made, He called it good. Then God made humanity in His own image, male and female, who were to be the stewards of all that He had made on Earth. When God once again looked at all He had made, He found it *very* good. Unfortunately, ever since the Fall, we humans have used God's creation for our own destructive ends. Pope Francis, in an attempt to call greater attention to this problem, promulgated the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in 2013. However, a Pixar employee by the name of Andrew Stanton had also decided to explore these issues in his film, *WALL-E*, not even a decade earlier. These two pieces of media, while dissimilar in style, are both concerned with consumerism, ecological sustainability, and technology, all while offering eerily similar solutions to each of these problems.

In the opening shots of the movie, the viewer gets a horrifying look at the skyscraper-high waste that has built up on Earth. Humanity is nowhere to be found, as they have escaped their responsibilities by flying away on an intergalactic cruise ship named the *Axiom* and leaving millions of WALL-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter: Earth-Class) robots to clean up the mess. The robots eventually fail, as all of humanity's other attempts to save the Earth do, and only one WALL-E robot is fortunate enough to survive the hostile wasteland the Earth has become. Pope Francis was writing in the 21st century when he lamented that "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (*Laudato Si'*). One look at the growing Pacific Garbage Patch is more than enough to validate this claim, but we can rationalize this away by noting, quite reasonably, that this problem doesn't affect us personally. But like the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, *WALL-E* gives us a grim look at a future, over a century hence, where this warning is completely ignored and it has, in fact, gotten personal. Will we, the wasteful Scrooges, heed this call, or will we once again call "humbug" like we have for so long? Yet even in this desolate wasteland, WALL-E is able to find a little, life-giving plant, proving that the Earth, even in those times when it is most denigrated and trashed upon, is not yet entirely lost to its litter.

Another thing worth noting about this movie is that the supermall WALL-E drives by early on in the movie (and even WALL-E himself) was, like the *Axiom*, built and owned by a corporation named "Buy n Large." Before overseeing the evacuation from Earth as an international government body, Buy n Large encouraged rampant consumerism among its customers. This continues on the *Axiom*, where Buy n Large supplies things from standardized smoothies to brand loyalty propaganda in the form of robot-run daycare. Pope Francis once again warns us that "since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending." (*Laudato Si'*). This "whirlwind," in *WALL-E* and in real life, has contributed a great deal to the environmental crisis we now find ourselves in, as not everything we buy and consume is necessary for human flourishing. Once these unnecessary things outlive their usefulness, they are simply thrown away without a second thought. But, as of now, the trash we throw away has to end up somewhere on this planet, and it seems to be most convenient for us to forget that fact. Buy n Large and all of humanity forgot this fact in *WALL-E*—until they realized, too late, all the damage that had been done to their own planet.

As WALL-E arrives at the *Axiom* in search of his love EVE, he finds a ship consumed by technology. EVE herself is a futuristic, life-seeking robot sent from the *Axiom* whose technological capabilities far surpass WALL-E's own. The rest of the robots perform all the jobs that humanity, now extremely overweight, unintelligent (to put it nicely), and unwilling to walk, can no longer do. Even the captain, who is supposed to be in charge of the *Axiom*, has relinquished his power to an autonomous co-pilot fittingly named AUTO. The *Axiom* supplies its passengers with "self-driving" hoverchairs to compensate for this infantilization, but this only reinforces their complacent lifestyle by rendering physical activities unnecessary. This is a massive problem, according to Pope Francis, as he says that "when media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously" (*Laudato Si'*). This is certainly the case in *WALL-E*, where the passengers of the *Axiom* have become so engrossed in their own screens that they don't even look at the person next to them. This is mostly likely because their hoverchairs are equipped with holo-screens capable of video calls, discouraging face-to-face interaction by making it relatively more laborious. It is only when WALL-E intervenes within these

passengers' lives that they realize the beauty they had missed—both on the Axiom and on their wounded Earth.

Through all of his wanderings, WALL-E swerves around the commonly held heresies of consumerism and complacency by retaining an innocent, child-like curiosity that a lot of us lack. It causes his infatuation with EVE, to be sure, but that love is based in a greater infatuation and awe with the rest of the world around him. He views the world not as something to be used or consumed without a second thought, but as something inherently valuable and full of beauty. Pope Francis concurs, time after time, when he reminds us (in various ways) that “the world is God’s loving gift” (*Laudato Si*). As a robot who gains consciousness after humans have left, WALL-E can’t possibly believe, as Christians do, that the world is God’s creation—but as a consciousness that happens to be a robot, he knows intuitively that the world is worth caring for. After all, it is *very* good.

The Work of Many Hands

A Bug's Life and *Rerum Novarum* on Capital and Labor

The book of Exodus recounts how the Israelites suffered under the slavery of Pharaoh—a slavery of hard labor and barren heat. Treated as subhumans, the Israelites were forced to work for Pharaoh against their own will. They “groaned under their bondage and cried out,” waiting for God to save them from their miserable condition. While the workers of the Industrial Revolution were not forced into their labor as the Israelites were, the underlying attitudes toward them, the miserable conditions they had to endure, and the monetary miseries many were subject to were quite similar to those of Egyptian bondage. In response to this crisis, and in response to other solutions to this crisis, Pope Leo XIII felt it was necessary to do what few popes had done before: write a letter (which came to be known as an encyclical) to the faithful on societal issues from a uniquely spiritual perspective. Just over one hundred years later, after the horrors of Nazi Germany and Soviet Communism, a small band of animators at Pixar led by John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton created *A Bug's Life*, a film that sees a colony of ants face a very similar form of oppression as those workers of old. These two works, though dissimilar in style, both champion the rights of workers to work without fear and the duty of employers to respect the dignity of their workers, while also showing the tendency of those workers to revolt if demands are not met.

The main conflict of *A Bug's Life* is driven by a gang of grasshoppers' mistaken idea that the members of an ant colony are inherently inferior to themselves. Each year, the grasshoppers—led by their boss Hopper—collect an offering from the ants in exchange for the verbal consolation that the grasshoppers will protect the ants from bugs that would “take advantage” of them. While this at first seems like a good bargain, it is soon revealed that, instead of actually doing anything to protect the ants, Hopper and his gang simply idle away, having fun and frolicking to “La Cucaracha” at a worn-down desert lair. And when Flik, a dutiful worker ant, accidentally drops a year's offering into a river, the grasshoppers show little mercy—Hopper orders the ants to produce double the amount of food by the time “the last leaf falls” or else submit to direct grasshopper control. In stark contrast to this mindset, Pope Leo XIII reminds us that employers are bound “not to look upon their work people as their bondsmen, but to

respect in every man his dignity as a person ennobled by Christian character" (*Rerum Novarum*). Hopper and his gang flagrantly violate these duties, inculcating a sense of inferiority into the ants by constant condescension (the phrase "mindless soil-shoving losers" comes to mind). It is quite telling, then, that when Hopper explains the reason for going back to the ants for their offerings, he says that "it's not about the food—it's about keeping the ants in line." A similar logic of scientific inferiority was most obviously used to justify the institution of slavery and the Holocaust, but it is also present in every instance where subordinates—even subordinates justly designated as such—are mistreated due to their status.

Because of their ideas of ant inferiority, Hopper and his gang feel no qualms about making great use of fear tactics in order to gain access to the fruits of the colony's labor. For example, Hopper uses a vicious, demented grasshopper named Thumper as a personal "attack bug" of sorts, threatening the use of force against the colony and thus subjugating the ants with an iron fist. These tactics work so well that, when the grasshoppers come to collect their offerings, the ants run into their tunnels to wait out their visit as if it was a natural disaster. Even while his gang is away, Hopper keeps the ants fearful by keeping the possibility of a more oppressive management hanging over their heads. Through these shows of force and fear, the ants feel completely helpless in the face of Hopper's oppression, thus allowing themselves to be grossly mistreated without much protest. Pope Leo XIII, however, decries such a use of terror, saying that "if through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accept harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice." (*Rerum Novarum*). We humans have seen such shows of force and fear before—we've seen them in the Nazis and the Soviets, to be sure, but such shows are becoming increasingly common in an increasingly polarized America.

As the events of the movie progress, however, the grasshoppers increasingly infringe on the ants' dignity and self-rule, causing the ants more stress and—in the end—more frustration. Burdened by a labor made even worse by Hopper's harsh expectations and overjoyed at the chance of divesting themselves of the grasshoppers by means of Flik's band of "warrior bugs," the ants decide to stop contributing to their offering and gain more confidence in the possibility of self-rule. However, this is not without downside—Pope Leo XIII explains that "the grave inconvenience

of this not uncommon occurrence should be obviated by public remedial measures; for such paralysing of labor not only affects the masters and their work people alike, but ... on such occasions, violence and disorder are generally not far distant, and thus it frequently happens that the public peace is imperiled" (*Rerum Novarum*). While it is true that the ants are able to live in peace before the grasshoppers find out about the colony's actions, it is also true that, once the grasshoppers arrive and find a paltry offering, they are punished by Hopper and his gang for their idleness. But by this time, the ants have had enough—Flik is able to convince them to rebel.

In the real world, such conflicts between employer and employee luckily do not have to end in revolution, as it so happens in *A Bug's Life*, as they can instead be resolved through more peaceable means. Pope Leo XIII understands that non-violent means are preferable to violent ones, but when men driven by mistaken notions of humanity subjugate workers to their will by means of fear, those workers are bound to feel the need to restore justice on their own. Managers as cruel as Hopper and his gang are (I hope) few and far between, but their demise serves as a cautionary tale as to what the working population will do in order to restore justice if they are pushed to the end of their strength.

A Matter of Life and Death

Puss in Boots: The Last Wish and *Evangelium Vitae* on The Value of Human Life

“What have you done?” This is what God says in the aftermath of the first murder. Cain had killed his brother, Abel, out of jealousy and hatred, and he thought that by murder he could obtain the favors he desperately desired. Nothing could be further from the truth—God punished Cain, banishing him from the bloody land he worked and leaving him to wander off disappointed and unfulfilled. Unfortunately, this crime was to be only the first in a long line of unnatural deaths—motivated by reasons both petty and sordid—that still lives on today. It is on this topic that Pope St. John Paul II decided to write *Evangelium Vitae*, an encyclical that upholds the inalienable dignity and value of each and every human life. Around thirty years later, DreamWorks Animation released *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*, the sequel to a spin-off of *Shrek 2* that surprised a lot of people by taking on issues quite similar to the late pope’s letter, as it chronicles the titular Puss in Boots’ wrestling with death, mortality, and the substance of a life well-lived. This whole-hearted approval of the dignity of life amid a careless culture of wanton death is what brings these two works together, and it is a message that is needed now more than ever before.

As a cat, Puss is originally granted nine lives to live as he wishes; by the time the first few scenes are over, however, he’s wasted all but one to aggrandize his own ego and solidify the legend he has created. Pope John Paul II explains that, for people like Puss, “the so-called ‘quality of life’ is interpreted primarily or exclusively as economic efficiency, inordinate consumerism, physical beauty and pleasure, to the neglect of the more profound dimensions—interpersonal, spiritual and religious—of existence” (*Evangelium Vitae*). This attitude is certainly visible in Puss, as after a run-in with a deadly lupine bounty hunter and news of a life-restoring Wishing Star, he seeks to regain the legendary status he once had and—ostensibly—burn through another eight lives as a result. Indeed, as a society we too can find ourselves wrapped up in similar conquests for appreciation and status, and we too can tend to think that these desires are more important than the dignity and value that all human lives share. This tendency can engender acts of murder and other egregious acts, but it can also cause sligher, more insidious harms to human dignity, such as

wounding a person's reputation in order to "score points" with society as a whole. As Puss soon finds out, however, living in this way only invites sorrow and leads to a hopeless, friendless death if not repented of. "Was the legend so big," he muses about his past lives, "there was no room for anyone else?"

In a similar way, the greedy, gluttonous Big Jack Horner treats his "Baker's Dozen" batch of mercenaries as means to his own wish. He treats them with such a nonchalant abandon that only one of the thirteen survives until the fight at the Wishing Star—only for the survivor to be promptly killed off without much fanfare. As Jack Horner pithily explains to his doomed Jiminy Cricket stand-in after witnessing the deaths of some of his own lackeys, "you can't bake a pie without losing a dozen men." One way that Jack Horner is different from Puss, however, is that he wants to play God instead of merely pleasure himself. Pope John Paul II expounds further on this topic of self-divinization, stating that "the eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism" (*Evangelium Vitae*). This desire to usurp God's power for himself makes Jack Horner much more resistant to change and redemption than the pleasure-seeking Puss, and it also acts as his justification for regarding his men as little more than objects. Variants of this attitude are, I sincerely hope, not widespread in modern culture, but to say they are irrelevant in figuring out this "culture of death" that we find ourselves in is misleading, to say the least. It may be masked by a genuine desire for human progress, as it is in justification for euthanasia and in-vitro fertilization, but the root of those reasons is a prideful desire to forge our own path without the confines of divine planning.

In stark contrast to these overvaluations of reputation and power stands Perrito, a little dog who joins Puss on his journey despite having no wish of his own but to have a friend. At first, Puss dismisses the poor mutt as unintelligent for his grateful outlook on life and singular drive for friendship. As they journey towards the Wishing Star, however, Perrito's insistence that life should be cherished for the gift it is allows Puss to reflect on his past lives and discern what really matters to him. While Jack Horner's ultimate desire is soul-crushing power, in the final analysis, Puss's ultimate desire is to love and be loved, even if at the beginning of the movie he decides to pursue it in unsatisfactory ways. Pope John Paul II spoke highly of this desire, as he says that "Christ's blood reveals to man

that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in the sincere gift of self" (*Evangelium Vitae*). As Puss's friend, Perrito does numerous self-giving things to aid the titular feline in his journey. The best example of this, however, is when he helps Puss through a panic attack brought on by the sudden appearance of the lupine bounty hunter who first wounded him. Upon noticing Perrito's presence, Puss feels compelled to confess his fears of death, regrets from the past, and desire to make amends. Puss thus realizes that life, if spent in love and self-gift, is more than worth the pain it will inevitably entail.

As the "culture of death" exerts an ever-tightening vice grip on our minds and souls, the journeys that Puss goes on—both to the Wishing Star and to a greater appreciation for life's beauty—act as a welcome relief from the various, vainglorious narratives that (directly and indirectly) demean the inherent dignity of human life. While *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* may not be an explicitly Christian movie, its affirmation of the value of life nevertheless calls Christians—and especially Catholics—to a higher standard. Life is sacred, to be sure, but life should also be a sacred joy. The words that the bounty hunter says to a humbled Puss at the Wishing Star succinctly sums up this philosophy: "Life your life, Puss in Boots. Live it well."