

Lasallian Commencement Address

January 1999

Presented by: Cynthia Zalatel

Good afternoon, and welcome to the members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, the Christian Brothers, President Br. James Gaffuey, Faculty, Staff, Graduates, and also families and friends. I am honored to be the Lasallian Student speaker on this very special day in our lives. This is truly a day of great accomplishment for all of us.

I have had a wonderful experience here at Lewis University. As an **adult** student, returning to school after 14 years, I recall my first days as feeling frightened, overwhelmed and insecure. There were **so many** younger and seemingly more confident students around me. I soon realized that I was not unique. Many of my classmates, whether 18 or 48, married or single, commuter or resident, felt the same way.

It did not take very long however, for our fears and insecurities to go away. We were nurtured, encouraged, listened to, and **genuinely** cared for. It was **this** support that enabled us to achieve our personal and professional goals. It was not until later that I realized this caring behavior is at the foundation of the University's Lasallian Mission.

Lewis University, through its Mission, has made a commitment to the values of St. John Baptiste De LaSalle, the founder of the Christian Brothers. These values are formally stated in many places throughout the University. I may not recall the exact words, but I will always remember what they mean to me. The value of association, that strong sense of community so present at Lewis University, has played a major role not only in **my** growth as a student, but also in the lives of my fellow nursing students as well. Nowhere else have I observed the respect and collegiality that exists here at Lewis University. This sense of community enabled me to both receive from and contribute to the University in ways I **never** thought possible.

As nursing majors, there were always challenges that we helped each other meet.

Balancing studies with work and family life was a hardship for many of us. Responding to this difficulty, I established a peer tutoring program in the summer of 1997. As I started this endeavor, I recognized it was not going to be easy. We all had different schedules, different priorities, and family demands. There just wasn't enough time. It was quite a request to ask my colleagues to make even more room in their busy lives for tutoring and support. I was elated by the positive response that I received from my fellow students. They gave their time, their talents, and their hearts to each other.

Today, the tutoring program remains strong with approximately 30 tutors volunteering each semester at more than one Lewis campus. Although I was the person who initially recognized the need for tutoring and took the first steps toward establishing the program, I was not alone. Those who joined me in this effort deserve credit for its success.

We didn't realize back in the summer of 1997 that what we were doing for each other was exactly what we had experienced ourselves. We had been nurtured, cared for and supported by so many faculty and staff and ended up learning maybe our most important lesson of all... how to care for each other.

As a member of the Lewis University Scholars Program, I witnessed how students, brought together in a spirit of association, collaborated to solve problems, shared dreams, and provided encouragement to each other in ways that clearly demonstrated that this nurturing and support was a University-wide phenomenon. But this support and encouragement doesn't just happen in the College of Nursing and the Scholars Program, it is evident in other departments and offices around the University. I'm sure you too, have experienced this same spirit of association and support in your particular academic department.

The support didn't just happen here at Lewis, it happened in our homes as well. **So** on behalf of the class of **1999**, thank you to the moms and dads, husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, our kids, brothers and sisters, grandmas and grandpas. And a special thanks to my own personal community-my family.

Six years ago my husband asked me what **seemed** to be a simple question, one that sparked a **major change** in our lives. He asked me "Do you remember when we were in high school what you had said you wanted to do when you grow up?" I always dreamt of being a nurse; to be able to help others. He replied, "Why don't you do it then? Why don't you go to nursing school?" We sat down with our kids, Jake and Erin, then 12 and 10 ½, and asked them what they thought about the idea. We explained to them that things would not necessarily be the same at home- mom would not only be working, but would also have to go to school and do homework. Dishes and laundry would no longer be the priorities.

It took teamwork from all of us to get through these past few years. The kids learned to do their own laundry and to help keep the house clean. My husband took over the **privilege** of cooking and driving the kids around when I couldn't. The rest of my family was also very supportive, especially my mom and dad.

All of us here today have been so fortunate in family and so blessed by God. Finally, in the spirit of John Baptist De LaSalle, I urge you, as you leave Lewis University, whether to attend graduate school or enter a new profession, to be that person who responds to a need; who takes responsibility and who serves. Make your mark on humanity and be proud that you are a graduate of Lewis University.