

Lasallian Commencement Address

May 1995

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Good afternoon, members of the faculty, professional staff, administration, board of trustees, my fellow graduates and other students, alumni, beloved family members, and distinguished benefactors. I am pleased and honored to be with you on this special day. I am especially honored that I have been asked to deliver the Lasallian address for this commencement exercise.

Nominated by several members of the faculty and professional staff as one who might have something significant to say about our Lasallian heritage and its impact on the life of students here, I have carefully considered our mission in light of my experience. I am also aware that this address is not my address, but rather my voice speaking for many of us who graduate today.

Our mission statement speaks of five central and distinctive values which direct and inspire our action. They are knowledge, fidelity, wisdom, justice, and association. I shall direct my remarks to the experience of association at Lewis.

Lewis University's mission describes association as the process of forming a community of mutual respect, collegiality, collaboration and service. This statement challenges us to come together, to listen to one another, to learn from one another to work with one another, and to take care of one another. And together take care of others as well. In this past week 24 members of our community traveled to the hills of Appalachia to spend a week working alongside the poor of Virginia. We are challenged in all of this to respect the uniqueness of individuals while at the same time finding the thread that links us together and creates the tapestry that is Lewis.

Throughout my career at Lewis University, I have been a part of many associations, received many acclamations, and served hundreds both here and in the larger community. I have been challenged in several ways as the youngest student ever to be president of the Black

Student Union; as the organizations, councils, and service groups while maintaining my academic work as an honor student. But none of these were more challenging than presenting a personal reflection on one of our Koinonia Retreats Luk XI. Koinonia is a weekend getaway which brings together 60 students, faculty, and staff at Lasalle Manor. There, team leaders present reflections, facilitate sharing groups, listen to each other, learn about our similarities and our differences, and most of all, just enjoy being in each other's company. A true experience of association...

In a reflection one opens oneself to share with others, experiences of significance and thought of great importance that guide us.

My reflection was entitled: "We are the Church". When talking with the Koinonia Community about how the church is a unique and special community of the faithful, I talked about the many churches in my life: my university, my sorority, my friends, my career, my parish, my personal faith, and, very strongly, my family, especially about my little brother, Darius.

I spoke about how his birth fostered a bond within my family and how through shared efforts we raised this new baby together. His surprising entrance into my family life strengthened my local parish, family, and neighborhood associations as well. At the end of my reflection, I looked into the faces of those who had joined me on this retreat and say 64 brothers and sister who said, "I understand you. I respect you. I share your feelings."

Instantly, by sharing my personal experiences and opening up so that others could be a part of my life, I developed an association, a bond, a relationship with 64 new people.

New we who celebrate this graduation also have a bond. We may not have had the same major or belonged to the same organizations we may not have even seen each other before, but we share Lewis! Lewis is the name to which we give all the wonderful experiences and people we share in our time together. For me, Lewis is experiencing like, Koinonia, the Gospel Fest, the

Fall Formal, mentors like Br. Bob Murphy, supportive persons like Dorothy Meagher, professors like Walter Pascale, and shoulders to lean on, like those of Betty Byrd.

Lewis is even my parents, who support me 200 percent and sacrificed so I would be successful.

There is something here... something that has touched every one of us in a special way and that is our common bond. For me this total experience called Lewis is the thread that joins us. It is the tie that holds us together. It is the history that makes us one. Martin Buber, a philosopher, has said that, "All real living is meeting others"

Today we realize this association in our lived experience with each other. And just as important, today we celebrate that association and are called to continue through our zealous efforts to support the University's shared values and common vision.