

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May, 2002
Presented by Lauren Sandusky

Good Morning Members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family and friends.

It was God who created life as we know it. It is God's will that put people together on this earth and it is God's will that everyone differs from one person to the next, that everyone has his or her own unique identity. How we choose to live our lives is entirely up to us. The people that we surround ourselves with, the communities we build, and the environments that we live in contribute to who we are. Diverse people and diverse living and learning environments build character and foster our growth. Lewis University is one such community where we all have experienced this growth, enriched our lives and developed our own identities. The Lewis University Mission Statement emphasizes the Lasallian value of Association, which encourages a community atmosphere among students, faculty, and staff while honoring and respecting diversity and fostering unity.

I would like to tell you a story about my experience as a member of the Lewis community that illustrates the mission value of association. Because of Lewis University, I met a remarkable person, whom I could tell, within minutes, would be a life long friend. Over the past two and a half years, this friend and I have spent endless hours talking, numerous nights watching movies, and have celebrated almost every holiday together. By his strength, knowledge, and positive outlook on life, he has taught me to laugh if when life becomes difficult, to take time to look at the stars, and most importantly to listen to my heart and be myself. My friend's name is Robert, and he is a person with mental retardation. Our friendship would not have been possible had it not been for all of the wonderful opportunities and support given to students by Lewis University. I was encouraged to help in establishing a chapter of Best Buddies, a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with mental retardation by providing opportunities for one-to-one friendships. Our chapter held its first meeting at Lewis University in 2000. It was through Best Buddies that my friendship with Robert

blossomed. Over the years, Lewis University has given its students the opportunity to encounter a vast array of experiences. Best Buddies is just one of the academic and organizational programs available to all students. I am sure, that each of you can tell your own story of what the Lewis community has done for you!

Since the moment you walked onto a Lewis University campus, you became part of this Lewis Community, a community of people who have come together for teaching and learning, a community that emphasizes both knowledge and spirituality, and a community that most importantly accepted you for who you are and who you want to become. Faculty, staff, and students are united together through the mission values of association and justice to create a unique community that has allowed all of us to grow within what we understand at Lewis as a sanctified zone, a place where people are committed to an effort to end racism, bias, and prejudice by valuing diversity in a safe and nurturing environment. The diversity of ethnicity, intelligence, age, culture, and experience come together like a puzzle with each piece being just as important as the next. As a member of many diverse communities, including family, friends, and co-workers, we realize that they offer support, guidance, and a sense of belonging. Communities have given so much to me that I feel it is my responsibility to give back. I urge you to do the same!

Graduates, as we leave Lewis University and take part in other communities, we have the ability to impact our world. As graduates, we now possess the knowledge and ability to help enrich other communities. Everything we do has an effect on the community as a whole. Each person chooses actions that affect the community and each action can either strengthen or weaken it. No matter what we do, it does make a difference. One person can make a difference. I know this to be true because Dr. Laura Sloan, a faculty member here at Lewis, chose to make a difference in my life. She saw something in me others did not, she believed in me and gave me a chance at leadership, and she challenged me to grow spiritually, intellectually, professionally, and personally. I wouldn't be the same person today, without her mentoring.

What kind of difference will you make? That difference can be positive or negative; the outcome is your choice. The Lewis community has proven that through

service to others, each person possesses the ability to make a positive difference. Use your abilities and talents that you have gained at Lewis University to improve this world.

Today, I encourage the Lewis University class of 2002 to take the seed of the Lewis Community that has been given to us and plant it wherever we go and in whatever we do. Nurture the seed through service and dedication and it will grow. By taking with us a part of the Lewis community, we will enrich other communities. By doing so, we are enabling magical things to occur, like the friendship between Robert and me. I am sure that each and every one of you has a “Robert” who has inspired you and has taught you lessons that you will carry with you the rest of your life. For some of you it may be your parents, or a professor, or maybe even a friend. Whatever form your “Robert” comes in, be sure today, to thank them for the inspiration and lessons learned. I stand before you and challenge each one of you to open your lives to diversity and establish relationships to build community. Go forward in life and take with you all you have learned at Lewis University. Good luck to all of you!