

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 21, 2000
Presented by Mara Mishler

My dear family and friends, I found Lewis by accident and I thank God every day that I did. I am an out of state student from Brighton, Michigan. Three years ago, my mom and I were in the area for a weekend soccer tournament in Naperville.

We ended up in Romeoville. We were sort of lost, but we had plenty of time since we had arrived on Friday afternoon. Somehow we ended up on Route 53. We saw the sign “Lewis University” and were instantly impressed by the front entrance way lined with beautiful flowers. During the drive from Michigan my mom and I had talked a long while about my frustration in my college search. I just couldn’t seem to find the place for me. She told me God would lead me to the right school and to quit worrying about it and to stop bugging her.

We pulled in. In just a short while we made contact with Michelle Mega in Admissions who showed us around and who put us into contact with John Kilpatrick in Radio/TV Broadcasting, and Mike Crowe, the women’s soccer coach. Within a few weeks I had decided to come to Lewis. Meeting up with the roommate Coach Crowe suggested confirmed the decision, Susie Scott. From the first day we have been sisters to each other. My first experience here set the tone for my years at Lewis. This year we celebrate the Mission Value that I experienced in those first days, the Value of Association. Association is the process by which we form a community of mutual respect for each other, collaboration in our work together, and service to others. Michelle Mega, John Kilpatrick, Mike Crowe and Susie are association in practice.

At the heart of Lewis’ Mission is Faith. The Mission challenges us to be faithful to God, to ourselves and to those around us in need, by joining with God in making the world a better place.

I would like all of you to think of the last time you did something nice, something kind, something good for someone else. If you haven’t already thought of it maybe you are looking for something really dramatic or outstanding. Don’t look so hard. The days you smiled and said hello. The days you held the door and helped another person carry her cafeteria tray because she looked tired, the day you asked someone how

they were and actually stopped to listen to what they had to say, the day you called and asked a classmate why they weren't in class and offered to help them catch up. The times you came over to study in another person's room so she wouldn't have to go it all alone....

Each of these made all the difference in the world. And little things are the building blocks to bigger things.

Some students, staff and faculty work in outreach at shelters, in tutoring programs, in immersion experiences in Appalachia and Mexico, having built upon these little things. But, little or big, it's the service for others that counts. How many of us say: "I wish I had done more. I wish I had been of greater service. I wish I had cared more deeply." But in things little or big, you cannot fail if you give another hope, courage, strength, and encouragement. Making a difference in the world is about opening your eyes and looking at the person next to you, and then looking a bit further down the road, and then further, and then further.

Our society encourages us to think first, second and third of ourselves. But the second another person smiles, says hi, and invites us to share our lives with them, we are encouraged to reach out as well. One of my favorite Country Western songs has these words: don't break the circle of love. Here's the story in the song. On a rainy night in the country an older women in a fancy sports car gets a flat tire. She watches as 20 cars drive by, then a very tired looking young man in an old rusty pickup truck stops and changes the tire. When the women pulls out her checkbook the man waves the check away and says, "I'm John. It's nice to met you and your welcome, just don't break the circle of love." Five miles down the road the woman pulls into a dinner and orders soup and a coffee from an obviously worn out, very pregnant waitress. When the waitress returns to the table to clear the dishes she finds a \$100 bill and a napkin with the words, "Just don't break the circle of Love." That night as the waitress crawls into bed she leans over to her husband whose work is exhausting him and who lives in constant worry that they won't have the money to care for their child. For the first time in many weeks, the woman has a feeling that things will be ok. She kisses him good night and says, "Everything will be alright, John." The circle of love. I challenge you, for the next two

weeks to mark down on a calendar everything you did to keep the circle of love. You will be amazed.

I am constantly amazed at how much more I have to learn about the circle of God's love. My father took me to Tanzania Africa, on a safari for spring break this year, a pre-graduation present, and a chance to spend time with my Dad. We had a great time. And the experience with our guide Pascal has impacted my life. Pascal has never been to America but he believes that many Americans don't really know how to be happy. I didn't really know what he meant until the 12th day of our trip when we visited a village, where the people lived in smelly, small, dark huts made of straw and cow dung. The children had flies on their faces, no shoes on their feet, and I felt bad for them. I told Pascal I felt sorry for the children. He laughed and asked me, "Did you see one of those children not smiling? Did you see one of those children that did not look happy? They spend every day with their families, do you?" Talk about being humbled pretty quickly. These are people who live in a world where good deeds, not the goods they possess are what counts. It confirmed for me what I have been sharing with you today. Our lives are enriched not by what we own, but by how we share, how we help, how we care. I wish Pascal could meet some of the people I love at Lewis. Many here believe as Pascal and his people do. The circle of love may appear different in Africa, but it's the same circle.

Those of you who know me, know that I have had a few struggles with my health. I am encouraged when I think of those who have helped me carry the load. I have been to emergency rooms more times than I want to count. University staff like Cari Murphy and Mike Zegadlo of Campus Life have journeyed with me to the emergency room. Medicines that I have tried have made me nauseous and I have spent a lot of time in bathrooms, hunched over in the grass, and over a garbage can with friends standing nearby.....acting as if everything was just fine. In caring for me, they proved that home is wherever people care about you. I also had their company in living the life of a regular college kid: class, parties, coffee houses, sports, games, Arts and Ideas. I was a member of bowling teams, soccer teams, and theatre productions. I stayed up all night, and I slept till two in the afternoon. I fell in love. I have had great friends and great teachers who were both patient with me and pushed me to excel- a pretty tough balancing act. We all

have special groups- for me the people of the Radio TV department are the people that I will miss so much.

I have friends who are very unsure of this whole “God thing”. If there is a God, they say, how does that God fit into my life. As a person of faith, I believe that God lives in every act of kindness. Christians believe that God loved us so much that he became one of us and lived a life as uncertain, as difficult, as limiting AND as joyful, purposeful, and giving as we do. Our God is not some distant being but one who walks with us each day encouraging us to join him in creating a better world in faith, and in association. Learn to be generous and also please learn to be accepting of the generosity of others. As I draw this reflection to a close I realize that the changes in me, the strengthening of my values, the person I am proud to be and to share, is no accident, and that God very much led me to this campus, to this moment, and to all of you. I suspect most of us here can say much the same thing. So say it! Congratulations and God’s blessing in your quest for happiness.