

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December 2002
Presented by Theresa Behlaradek

Good afternoon members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, families and friends. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome family and friends for being here today to share in this wonderful occasion. The support, understanding, faith, belief, and love you have given us throughout our endeavors have given us the strength to stay focused and to become the hard working, productive individuals we are today. For this, we are grateful.

And to our instructors, faculty, and staff-we thank you. You have provided us as students with the tools necessary to be creative, to think critically, and to be leaders in the workforce and throughout our communities. You have helped us to develop the skills necessary to be able to interact efficiently and effectively with others. Your commitment to our development reflects the Lasallian values shared by the Lewis community-the association that encourages us to interact as a teaching/learning community.

When I first began my studies at Lewis University, I had no idea what it meant to be “Lasallian”. Through the semesters, however, I have come to realize that according to the teachings of St. John Baptist de LaSalle, to be Lasallian is a way of life. It is how the professors teach. It is how the students learn. It is how we, students, faculty, staff, family, friends, fit under this “umbrella” of the Lewis mission.

As members of the Lewis University community, we have been provided with multiple opportunities and experiences, which have contributed to the development of our Lasallian character. One lighthearted but creative example comes to mind...when I was a sophomore, just starting the nursing program, our instructor for a particular class mentioned that there would be a question on our first exam pertaining to the Lewis Mission values of Justice, Fidelity, Knowledge, Wisdom, and Association. We (our class) memorized a rhyme we fashioned as JFKWA. Needless to say, (Brother James), we all managed to get that question right. We didn't know then, however, that the context of this Mission would become so important to who we were, what we would become, and the impact it would have in the semesters to follow.

About a month ago, in my last semester of the nursing program, my class had the opportunity to spend a day (a cold and wet November day) in the forest preserves- assigned to and completing a variety of tasks (I like to refer to it as “Boot Camp for Nurses”). These tasks focused on team building skills as well as collaboration among the team members. We were encouraged by each other to complete these tasks, we trusted each other during these tasks, and we formulated strategies that would eventually lead us to a successful outcome. The point is...this experience encompassed the Lasallian values of justice, fidelity, knowledge, wisdom, and association that we have come to understand and appreciate, those values which our Lasallian education at Lewis has emphasized.

At the end of the day, we reflected on what we had learned about ourselves. One member of my group stated that she realized she was still a follower. She said this thinking that she had failed. Our group recognized through this experience that she had not failed. Though leadership is important, it is the exemplary followers who give authenticity to the leader. Without followers, there can be no leader. A leader knows when to step down and let the followers lead-just, as John Baptist de LaSalle knew when to step back and let his Brothers lead the schools. The Lewis mission values have shaped us into those exemplary followers and leaders we have become. It is our faith in God, however, that enables us to practice these values and to be the responsible, knowledgeable, and respected members of society that we are today.

Lasallian scholars teach us that faith and zeal are two unique components of our educational experience in a LaSallian school. Faith, our trust in God, and zeal, our energy and enthusiasm for what is important, are integral parts of our identity as Lewis University students. Without zeal, faith has no substance, and without faith, zeal has no purpose. We are challenged to take this understanding beyond our educational experiences-to extend it into our daily lives. Each individual has a purpose and we have the opportunity to learn from and to teach one another...to continue learning...to continue teaching...to continue being Lasallian.

Our Catholic and Lasallian education has given us the means by which to grow as individuals and as professionals. We will put into practice these values and knowledge and in doing so we will make a difference in the lives of people we meet. And...to be

passionate about what we do. Because it is our passion and persistence that makes the impossible possible.

In a few minutes, we will have the opportunity to express our appreciation to our family, friends, faculty and staff for their support and guidance. I would like to share with you and all who feel as strongly about life as I do, a quote my Dad shared with me in a most precious letter... “Life is measured not by how many breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away...”

Thank you. And, God Bless....