

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December 2006
Presented by: Katherine Yucius

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

After all these years of studying, taking exams, and writing papers, the time has now come for us to walk across this stage and get the diploma that we have all worked so hard to achieve. The diploma affirms not only the merit you have attained in your major, it also attests that you have received an education guided by the values of knowledge, wisdom, justice, association and fidelity. So before you cross the stage and flip your tassel, there are a few thoughts about the Lasallian values that I would like to share.

Through my nursing experience and projects with ministry, I have been blessed with many opportunities to grow in the Lasallian values. The most remarkable experience occurred last summer when I traveled to Bolivia with people from Lewis and other universities. The experience embodied the values of fidelity, association and justice.

On the trip, our group was immersed in a very different culture. I feel it is important to develop associations with people from other ethnicities and backgrounds, because we can learn so much from each other. Looking at the world through someone else's eyes allows us to see past the things that cloud our own vision.

For example, the slower pace of the Bolivians reminded me to slow down and appreciate the small things in life, like hot showers, ice water, and washing machines, which for the duration of the trip I lived without. The vibrant culture and joy of the Bolivian people reinforced the idea that material belongings do not bring happiness; rather, it is the love and relationships with others that bring true joy.

I also had the privilege of working with children who were mentally and physically handicapped. Initially, I feared working with these children would be heartbreaking because of their disabilities and lack of resources. But, after spending time with them, I learned they had many special gifts. They were warm and selfless despite their poverty. They could make intricate crafts such as scarves and bookcases that were much nicer than I could make. Through this, I learned that no matter what handicaps others may have, they still may have extraordinary gifts. We just have to take the time to notice.

Among the Bolivian children, there was a girl who wanted to go down a slide. When I went to assist her in this, I realized that this quite heavy child was paralyzed and completely unable to walk. I almost told her that she would be unable to go down the slide. Then I realized that I would not be a person to ever tell one of these amazing children that they would be unable to do something. So I scooped her up into my arms and carried her up the stairs so she could go down the slide again, and again, and again. Although I soon became worn out, the joy evident on the little girl's face made it worthwhile.

As you go out into the workforce, you will encounter many who are different than you. This will be the time to utilize the Lasallian principles of justice and association to learn from others. Focus on the gifts that others have and be amazed, rather than focus on their weaknesses. When others have weaknesses or barriers, sometimes they may need to be carried. This may be difficult and tiresome, but will prove to be worthwhile. For if it were you who needed to be carried, you would want someone to do the same for you.

It has been mentioned many times in the crossroads that occur at graduation that this is an end to one era and the beginning of another. However, at this crossroads, I implore my fellow graduates not to wait for such a momentous occasion as graduation to feel a new beginning. Rather, take advantage of new beginnings more frequently. Each day is a new beginning which could be embraced with fervor and zest. Each day is a chance to learn something new and explore new options. Each day you can grow in knowledge, progress in wisdom, fight injustice, develop associations, and discover new meanings in life.

A good friend once told me that on your gravestone there are two dates, representing birth and death. Between these two dates, there is a dash. Though the dash is merely a line, it is the most important part. Embrace each day and make the most of your dash. Things aren't always perfect, but sometimes in life it is the imperfections that make things worthwhile. And for the truly unjust imperfections, may you be blessed with the foolishness and idealism to believe that you can change the world, so you will do the things that others tell you cannot be done. Thank you and Congratulations Fellow Graduates!