

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December 2015
Presented by: Kelly Cisco

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

I would like to start by saying thank you to all of you who came to support your graduate. No one got here to this point alone. All of us had the support of our family and friends. So I would like to take this time to thank every one of you. Your love and support have not gone unnoticed and I'm sure I speak for everyone when I say we are grateful you could be here to celebrate this milestone with us.

I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the instructors and faculty. The relationships I developed with my instructors are some of the most memorable aspects of my overall Lewis experience. All of my instructors made the time for their students and they were much more than just teachers. They all made themselves available, offered their assistance and support whenever a student needed them, gave friendly advice, and guided us down each of our individual paths here at Lewis. Every professor touched me in some way and we are incredibly lucky to have been able to learn from such a dedicated group of individuals

I am so incredibly honored to be standing here in front of you today. Fellow graduates - I am not going to talk to you about our freshman year when we met our roommates or those late night study sessions in the dorm. I am clearly not a "traditional" student and my experience has been much different from many of yours. For 16 years, I worked as a paralegal. I had a good job that paid well, but I was trapped by my circumstances and I wasn't happy. Five and a half years ago, I decided to take a chance and go after my dream – to follow my passion to teach. I was 42 years old when I transferred here from Joliet Junior College. I was a wife, a mother, and a grandmother. My background is different from the majority of you sitting here today, but from that unique vantage point I can offer you some valuable things to think about and take with you as you go out into the world.

Two and a half years ago, when I walked into my first class at Lewis – Foundations of Teaching and Learning with the amazing J-Buss, I was nervous and scared – scared of being the oldest one in the class – and I was – and scared of not being accepted – but I was. No one treated me like I was any different. I was accepted without question into the diverse and wonderful group that makes up the Lewis community.

I set my intentions from that first day to really immerse myself into the Lewis culture and do all that I could do to become a part of the community. I joined clubs, performed service work, went on a mission trip, and even studied abroad in Costa Rica. All of the experiences I have had here at Lewis have impacted me in a positive way and they have changed me immeasurably. My life, for many years, was less than ideal. Even as an adult with a few years' more life experience, my view was limited. I saw what I had to see to survive, but Lewis gave me the chance to broaden my perspective.

I didn't know anything about being Lasallian when I came to Lewis. I had never volunteered or done any kind of service work before. But, from my first time performing service work, I realized how rewarding it was and came to see it as a fundamental responsibility of mine as a human being. I feel it is important when telling you this, to share with you that I have been on the other side before. For quite a few years, I was a single mother doing what I could to just get by from day to day, taking care of my family. I was on food stamps and welfare and I have stood in line at a food bank to get a bag of food so my children could eat. Most of you probably have no idea what it's like to feel that kind of shame and to have to depend on the compassion of others. I encountered many people during those years who demonstrated Lasallian values without knowing it and without knowing what their benevolence meant to me. Because of my experiences, I can tell you how important it is for you to have empathy for others, to treat others with kindness and dignity, and to give to others in any way that you can. You never know how your actions might affect even one person and change that person in some way.

As members of the global community, we all should share in taking responsibility for the poor and oppressed. This is one of my biggest takeaways from my education at Lewis. It has become a part of who I am, as a human being and as an educator. As a Lasallian educator, I am tasked

with being a change agent. I must take responsibility for ensuring the poor and the oppressed are not limited by their circumstances, but instead have the same access to education as everyone else.

As Lasallians, we are called to be social justice advocates. We are all responsible for challenging the systems of oppression that exist and doing our part to affect change so that no one feels their future is without hope. As Lasallians, we have a responsibility to take a stand for what we believe in and go forth into this world and affect change. We must stay engaged in our communities and do what we can to make a difference. It is not enough for us to stand by passively and wait for someone else to do what needs to be done. We must step up and be the change and make a positive impact on our world.

After today, when the celebrations have ended and you return to everyday life, remember to go forth and do what makes you happy – do things that give you a sense of fulfillment. However, be sure to live your life in such a way that when you look in the mirror each day, you are happy with the person you see in the reflection.

Be sure to live every moment. You will all have bad experiences in life, but those moments don't define you. You will learn from them and they will shape the person you will become. If you take a wrong step, don't stop moving forward - look around and see what there is to learn and then keep on moving.

Life exists only in each moment. Keep your momentum directed toward the future, but today is all you are guaranteed. So live each day to its fullest – don't hold onto anger, don't let others define who you are, instead live your life the way you want to, and most of all, make the choice to be happy today because tomorrow is promised to no one.

Finally, I would like to leave you with some parting words from the incomparable Dr. Seuss - "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." Congratulations. Good luck. God Bless.