

## Lasallian Commencement Address

May 2022

Presented by: Lorelei Summers

Good morning, members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Livingston, honored guest, faculty, staff, friends, family, and of course, my fellow graduates- we made it. I am more than honored to be here before you and with you today.

To the class of 2022, our journey through college has been a series ups and downs, especially within the last two years through the pandemic. I remember going on the civil rights pilgrimage and standing in front of the Alabama Capitol house during spring break of 2020 while reading an email indicating that school would be shutting down for two weeks. As we all know, that two weeks turned into the rest of the semester and even some of fall 2020. But despite having our lives turned upside down, we did it. We are here in person, graduating together.

As I was writing this speech, I questioned what it meant to be Lasallian? When I think of being a Lasallian, I think of valuing one another and growing in a sense of community. At Lewis University, I discovered a community of people who were just like me, and I eventually met some of my closest friends. Since I was a commuter, I was worried about not making friends and just going through the motions of going to school and then going home, never interacting with others. I am glad to say that I was mistaken; I forced myself to go and talk to others and got involved in ministry. There I learned who Lasalle was and that not all Catholics are scary. The faculty and staff at Lewis really value each and every student by giving students their time and getting to know them personally. Lasalle taught others to respect all persons and that everyone has dignity, worth, and value. I see this as the foundation of Lewis University.

As a biology major and in true biology fashion, I like to picture the Lewis community as the human body and each one of us as a cell. We are each made up of 30 trillion cells, each one is unique and has its own function. Without the function of every cell, our body wouldn't work. Just like the cells that make up the human body, each one of us is a unique cell with our own special talents and expertise. Together we make up Lewis University and enable Lewis to function effectively as a Lasallian university. Your body does not look at a functioning cell and say, "We don't need you here" just as we as a community do not look at someone and devalue them. Every person is of value, like Paul said in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Chapter 12, "18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body." Within the body that is Lewis, we, as cells, interact and share our experiences with people from other parts of the body, creating this web of togetherness. I have always felt a presence of belonging and respect for all people here at Lewis through the different types of experiences that were opened up to me during my time here.

I was first brought into the realm of the Lasallian network through the International Association of Lasallian Universities. I was nominated to go to France for a conference to meet with other Lasallian students across the world to discuss what we are doing on our campus and about the different injustices in our own communities. Because of this experience, my eyes were opened to the world of Lasalle and what it means to be Lasallian. I was able to meet so many different individuals from around the world and saw that the Lasallian community that exists here at Lewis exists throughout the world. Every college student is going through the same hardships and stress that comes with going to school. It turns out, we aren't so different after all. Knowing that someone is having the same struggles as you, makes you realize that you aren't going

through life alone. What's beautiful about the Lasallian network is our passion for valuing each other, caring for one another, and knowing you always have someone to go to. I still talk to many of my international friends like I saw them yesterday even though it's been four years. I argue that this is because we share the Lasallian values.

Lewis University prides itself on caring for its students but also for people from the other communities through Community engaged learning experiences, through travel study, and through the different organizations like Best Buddies, the various Fraternities and Sororities, LASO, BSU, and all the other clubs and orgs we have on campus. Anywhere you go on campus, there is some sort of opportunity to contribute somewhere on campus or the community.

Some of you may be wondering, "Loralei, what does this have to do with me?" I urge you to think about this, Lewis has provided you with the necessary skills to make a difference in this world. Think about it, what skills and talents do we have that we can bring with us when we leave here? Can we make a difference in our world with our skills? I argue that we can.

I will leave you with a challenge from Nelson Mandela "We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference."

So, class of 2022, whatever you do in the future, let's remember to keep moving forward. Let's go change the world, one opportunity at a time. Congratulations everyone, we did it!