

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 2006
Presented by: Michael P. Douglas

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

Entering Lewis University for the first time as a transfer student in the combined special and elementary education program, I never really considered that this incredible moment in time would ever actually occur – that I would be standing here before you. Not only am I graduating this afternoon, but I have the highest honor of celebrating my fellow graduates' achievements as the student speaker at commencement.

Graduation is a time of transition, a time of change, hope, anxiety, and the moment when overwhelming reality becomes manifest in your life. Graduation also quietly demands that one step back and reflect on the University experience and its true impact on one's life and character. In order to be able to speak with you today, I had to go through this process and I would like to share a few thoughts on Lewis University and my experience here.

Behind me stand the values that Lewis University emphasizes and incorporates into the curriculum and all aspects of campus life. These values are wisdom, knowledge, association, fidelity, and Justice. Whether you have been aware of it or not, each of these values has had an impact on every moment of your matriculation at this University. What makes Lewis University different from others in the state is the sense of mission these values create in the faculty, staff, and fellow students we have all come to know and cherish. This mission, this passion, manifests itself in the faculty office doors that are always open, the little old lady that helps us register for classes, and even University

President Brother James Gaffney, who I manage to see often and everywhere even though I have been a commuter student.

Of the values of the Lasallian tradition that have impacted our lives during our time at Lewis, the most important value to me, the value that brings me to this ceremony today, and this podium at this moment, is the value of Justice. I believe Justice is one of the most important aspects of education at Lewis because it is this value that gives a context and mission to all the other values. It is in Justice that Knowledge, Wisdom, Fidelity, and Association find meaning and purpose.

Last semester, I had the opportunity of taking of taking a class called, Multiculturalism in Education, and my professor was Dr. Carolyn Dunmore. Dr. Dunmore passed away this winter, but what I will never forget about her is how she helped us to see that justice must be established in the field of education. It was in this class that I had the first opportunity to read a book by the name of “Savage Inequalities,” by Johnathon Kozol. Looking at the disparities of funding between schools in affluent and poorer areas, the book asked a simple question, “whether it is right that the place of one's birth should determine the quality of one's education.” We need only to turn to the heritage of St. John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Christian Brothers who sponsor Lewis University, to find the answer to that question. He revolutionized education nearly 300 years ago by insisting that classes be opened to the poor. In my own career, I hope to live by the value of Justice by ensuring that the poor have equal access to education.

I speak to you today as someone who is soon to be an educator, but when I speak of Justice I am speaking to everyone in this room. Today we graduate as Nurses, Social Workers, Pilots, Sociologists, Teachers, Business people, and many others, yet each of us

is able to apply the value of Justice to whatever profession we may pursue. As graduates we are blessed that we have matriculated at an institution that holds this principle in such high regard. As a Lewis Graduate I exhort you to be more aware of the less fortunate members of your communities and our responsibility to serve them. We are members of the select few who have the privilege of graduating from Lewis University, and we have a responsibility to take the skills and values we have been taught and use them in the service of Justice to benefit others. Let's go out from here today and fight those fights in your world that, in the words of Johnathon Kozol, "are big enough to matter, and small enough to win."