

Lasallian Commencement Address

May 1999

Presented by: Michael Michau

Thank you and welcome to the Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, the Christian Brothers, President Brother James Gaffney, Faculty, Staff, University graduates, family, and friends.

I ask that you try to visualize an awkward 18 year old high school graduate, his right leg scarred from a go-cart accident three weeks prior to starting college. He is an intelligent student, but he is scared and confused. It is the Fall of 1995, and he is a commuter student at a new school, and he is afraid of all the unknowns in his life.

Take a look at that scared 18 year old commuter, four years later. I am proud and quite surprised to be speaking to you today as the Lasallian Student Speaker. In my time here at Lewis University, I have seen significant personal and spiritual changes take place within myself. I hope that these changes have been experienced by all of today's graduates, resident and commuter, traditional age and returning adult, Romeoville, and off-campus students.

Lewis University, guided by its Catholic and Lasallian Mission, is based on the values and enriched by the heritage of the founder of the Christian Brothers, St. John Baptist De La Salle. Lewis and the Christian Brothers are guided by the values of Knowledge, Wisdom, Justice, Association, and Fidelity. These values were important to De La Salle more than three hundred years ago, and are important to us today. I will speak today about the value that De La Salle emphasized most strongly- Fidelity. It has helped shape the changes that have occurred within me over the past eight semesters. The portion of the University Mission Statement on Fidelity reads:

"Fidelity is the spirit which recognizes God as the ultimate reality, unifying the diverse forms of knowledge in the pursuit of fullness of truth, while recognizing the diversity of the human experience." More simply, Fidelity means how we discover our relationship with our God, and how this relationship manifests itself in our daily lives.

The "pursuit of fullness of truth" has always been the main objective in my life, but it took a university education to help me realize that was my objective. In many ways, prior to coming to Lewis, I was a closet intellectual. The fullness of my intellect was locked away. My life here has unlocked the door. My primary undergraduate major of Philosophy really opened my eyes to the idea that the search for truth is a development, a progression. This notion is implied in the value of Fidelity, the search for ultimate reality.

Throughout our studies and experiences at Lewis, we have learned much about life through the educational process, challenging and exploring first our ways of conventional ways of thinking and acting. I have always believed in challenging and exploring, but my education has given me the tools to do this at a higher level.

Lewis has empowered me to be proud of myself and proud of my actions, starting with an education that values social service. Through my service activities, I have attempted, in turn, to empower others to become reflective, educated, and whole persons of faith.

In my position at the Center for Academic and Personal Support as a tutor, my job was to lose my job. This meant that, if I were to succeed as a tutor, the students would realize that they were able to bring out the educator within themselves, and learn how to learn on their own, thus eliminating the need for peer tutoring.

Through my experiences as a member and a leader with the University Koinonia Retreat program, I learned the importance of coming to grips with the critical and introspective questions of life: "Who is God? , Where is my place in God's world? , Who is my neighbor, What does faith mean? "After the weekend was over, I felt my life taking a new direction because it had more meaning. I still cannot give an explicit response to any of the previously mentioned questions, however, I feel that I am on the right path to becoming a more complete human being because of my struggles and reflections on the meaning of life.

The English novelist E.M. Forster wrote, "It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity; personal discourse, and that alone, ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision." Forster tells us that by examining our daily lives, we discover the kingdom of God within ourselves, a life based solely in the here-and-now will inevitably end up meaningless and without direction. Sure, we may not know the exact direction that our lives are taking, but that's the personal sense of the Fidelity coming into play. We have to realize that there is something else to our lives, a spiritual and intellectual aspect that we must keep in touch with. For when we reflect and look toward the unknown, the transcendent, I believe that we see the face of God.

I feel that certain people have had a major influence on our development over our college years. I hope that we recognize and appreciate those people who mean so much to us-- our families, our parents, siblings, spouses, and other significant people who have supported us from the beginning. In particular, I would like to publicly thank my parents Mike and Carol my sister Lori and my brother Dan, for helping keep me centered and for showing concern for my education and growth at Lewis. I also thank my grandmother, on whose wisdom and caring I have thrived. I extend great appreciation to the people that I got to know on a deeper level here at Lewis. I would like to thank my girlfriend, my soulmate, Jill, for helping me feel good about myself, and teaching me about the meaning of love. A college education is meaningless without special professors and staff members who helped steer our lives in the right direction. I would like to sincerely thank those professors who have helped shape my intellect, namely Jim Houlihan, Mark Schultz, and most especially Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, whom I am glad to call a friend. She has single-handedly made me a better writer, a better thinker, and a better person. I am sure that you have a list of people that you would like to thank. I hope that you do.

Today, I challenge this Lewis University Graduating Class to be persons of Fidelity-- people of Faith: people who find the connection that people, events, and experiences have with the ultimate sense of reality, the connection with God. I also encourage the administrators and faculty to continue to be educators in the spirit of Fidelity, empowering students to be aware of the diversity of the human spirit.

Let us all recognize that there is a quality about us that cannot be calculated, analyzed or categorized-- our spirit. As people of many faiths, we seek to know God. Through selfless service, authentic behavior, and inward reflection, I deeply feel and strongly believe that we as humans can take part in the infinite. We can touch God.

Graduates, think of your Lewis University education not as a means to an end, but as a beginning, and never let your loving and learning end. Amen.