

JOURNEYS

The Address at the Graduate Hooding Ceremony (May 14, 2009)

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When I received the request to address you this evening, one of my first thoughts was “What can I possibly share with them that will be meaningful?” Let’s face it, who remembers what speakers at hooding ceremonies or commencement exercises have to say once the message has been given. If I were to ask, how many of you remember the message given at your high school graduation, or at your undergraduate commencement, I would be willing to wager, that most of you would not remember a thing. In many cases, you probably don’t even remember who the speaker was. Consequently, trying to come up with a brief and meaningful message has become my challenge! If only one or two of the members in this audience remember my message this evening, I feel I will have accomplished my goal.

As I prayed and reflected on what I was told is to be farewell message, I was inspired by Jesus’ challenge to “Go forth and bear much fruit”. My message this evening will attempt to offer a “recipe” and some “ingredients” to help you, dear graduates, as well as all of us present, to indeed go forth and bear much fruit.

I was reminded of a story I heard from a homilist one Sunday morning.

A preacher approached his congregation and said,

“Today I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that the roof of our church is in bad shape and needs to be replaced. That will be quite costly. The good news is that we **have** the money to do that. It’s in your pockets!”

Well, this evening I have some bad news and some good news for you also. Our society seems to be in bad shape and in need of stimulus and revitalization. The good news is that we have all the

ingredients needed to revitalize it, right here. All of us have within ourselves what is needed to begin to do just that!

You might say: How can that be so? I'm just a little speck in our world. That's very true! But remember that all it takes is for a seed or two to be planted and nurtured, and eventually to grow into a tree or bush that will bear much fruit. Just think of a blueberry bush. It doesn't really grow that tall, at least not in comparison to a mighty oak tree. However, in its own quiet little way, it produces hundreds of delicious blueberries for us to enjoy. This happens not just once, but several times during blueberry season and again each year of its lifetime. The same could be said for all fruit bearing plants, bushes, and trees. Bearing fruit to nourish us and to bring us pleasure is their way of accomplishing their mission in life.

Like them, we also have a mission which is to bear fruit of a different kind. This happens when we use our various talents to enhance and nourish the lives of those to whom we minister in our various careers and milieus. In most cases, this is also done without fanfare but our actions and/or words do affect lives, and can eventually produce positive results or "fruits" that bring about change.

One of the sisters in my religious order, who also was a colleague of mine when I ministered in another institution of higher education before coming to Rivier College, Sr. Jeannette Plante, went about trying to bring change wherever she went. She had a "motto", or I guess I could call it a favorite phrase or acronym, that she shared with her students and others who crossed her path. The exact origin of the concept seems a bit vague, but according to the Internet (www.whimdesigns.com), "P.A.C.E.® – Positive Attitudes Change Everything®", it was Jim Frederick who, in 2000, made this his motto. He claims that he woke up every morning saying those words, and when things got a bit difficult he repeated this phrase to himself at different times of the day (para.2) At any rate, Sr. Jeannette was so convinced of the power of this motto that we often heard her give this advice: "Remember P.A.C.E.". At first, people wondered what she meant but once she explained; her message was very clear. (The four letters on cards are shown).

- P Positive
- A Attitudes
- C Change
- E Everything

Sr. Jeannette was so convinced in the power of this message that she tried to live it every day and to share this short word with those who crossed her path. Two or three years ago, I happened to read a short article in the Nashua Telegraph about a teacher who was retiring, and to my surprise the reporter included a statement from this teacher where she referenced a former professor, Sr. Jeannette Plante, who had had a tremendous influence on her life, and she proceeded to explain P.A.C.E. For me, this was a WOW moment! Jeannette had made such a difference in this teacher's life that now; she was willing to share this motto with all who would read the newspaper article.

This evening, I share this "recipe" with you who are about to receive a graduate degree from Rivier College, as well as with all of us present. Since we are all involved in different careers and ministries either locally or elsewhere, imagine the impact we can make if we begin to face each day remembering P.A.C.E. (Positive Attitudes Change Everything). It's a powerful concept that needs to be remembered on a daily basis, one that can be difficult at times, but one that can help us change our attitude.

To assist us in carrying forth P.A.C.E., I offer these "ingredients" or tools which I believe will be easy to remember since they are based on the same letters – P-A-C-E:

- P = Patience
- A= Acceptance
- C= Caring and Compassion
- E= Enthusiasm –

Patience allows us to accept ourselves and others. Without it, there will be little to no tolerance.

Acceptance requires that we often look beyond appearances and see the good in others. George Everly Jr. (2009), in his book *The Resilient Child*, encourages his readers to give people “one compliment a day. Whenever possible, the compliment should be more about who they are, rather than something they have done. (p. 132)

Caring and Compassion motivate us to show kindness to others, especially those who cannot take care of themselves.

Enthusiasm brings life and sunshine to our day. Laughter and enthusiasm are contagious, thus they motivate us to look at life differently.

So let us remember and model P.A.C.E., by bringing patience, acceptance, caring and compassion, and enthusiasm to our immediate world so that it will be stronger and energized because we passed through it. Think how powerful this can be, and what a change this can bring, if we all enter our different ministries with a positive attitude. It might actually become contagious!!!

In conclusion, as a representative of Rivier College, I congratulate you, dear graduates, and I send you forth to use the knowledge and skills you have acquired during your studies at Rivier College to make a difference in your milieu and in the world at large. May all who come in contact with you, be enriched by your presence in their lives. Remember, also, Rivier College’s mission that invites all of us

“to strive for academic excellence,
to take responsibility for ourselves and for others, and
to engage in dialogue about basic human issues facing society,
especially the plight of the poor and the powerless.”

We count on you as our future agents of change.

Congratulations and God bless you!

* **LOUISE A. AUCLAIR, CSC, Ph.D.** earned a B.A. (English and Elementary Education) from Notre Dame College, a M.ED. (Reading) from Salem State College, and a Ph.D. (Higher Education) from Boston College. She was director of the Undergraduate Elementary Education program and the Graduate Reading program at Rivier College from 2002 to 2009. Prior to that, she taught graduate and undergraduate courses, was director of the Graduate Division, Dean of Education at Notre Dame College, and was instrumental in developing a teacher preparation program in Cap-Haitien, Haiti. From 1995 to 2003, she served as Dean of the Faculty of Education at Regina Assumpta in Haiti and was the liaison between that institution and Notre Dame College. She has served as a member of the Manchester Diocesan School Board, and on the Executive Board for Southern New Hampshire Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa for several years. In 2004, she received the Campus Compact for New Hampshire–Presidents’ Good Steward Award. Sr. Louise specializes in the areas of Children’s Literature and the teaching of Literacy in the Elementary Schools. Currently, she is an adjunct professor at Merrimack College in North Andover, MA.