

Student Lasallian Commencement Address  
January, 1998  
Presented by: Kurt Schackmuth

Good afternoon, and welcome to the members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, the Christian Brothers, President James Gaffney, Faculty, Staff, Graduates, and their families and friends.

We are here today to honor the completion of years of hard work. This gathering is the celebration of yet another milestone in our lives. But, in a very short time, some of us, including myself, will go on to graduate school, others will join the workforce or change occupations. Some will start a family, and others will continue on with their families started long ago. Many of us can say, that Lewis has prepared us very well, and that our experience of college has been a rewarding one. But trust me, this ceremony was the last thing on our minds when we arrived here.

Remember when you first came to Lewis? I suspect whether you were 18 or 35 or 50, you were probably like me; nervous, confused, and a bit overwhelmed. But I was lucky because even in those first moments, I felt that I belonged here.

You see, my father, was a professor, of Sociology at Lewis for fifteen years until his death in 1981. He was in his mid forties. My mother has told me that as a five year old, I used to come to Lewis with my dad, walking with him down the halls of the Academic Building, both of us with briefcases in our hands. I must admit that my memory of this is vague.

It was 12 years later in the fall of 1993 that I returned to Lewis to walk down the halls of that same Academic building, this time with a backpack slung over my shoulder. Here I met my Dad's colleagues, friends and former students. Here, in a sense, I met my Dad--not as a five year old, but as a young man. It has been a *good* experience.

While I recognize that my connection to Lewis is unusual, I am well aware of how often the people here make powerful connections. I hope this is true for many of you. What is *your* memory of that special faculty member, staff member or fellow student?

And, Lewis has changed dramatically since most of us first arrived here. It has grown physically, academically and spiritually. Our campus is larger and our facilities have been enhanced. The off-campus sites are plentiful, allowing greater accessibility for commuters. New graduate programs have been created and the Scholar's Program has been hailed nationally. We are graduating from a school which is gaining a reputation as one of the finest universities in the Midwest. Much of this is due to Lewis' increased emphasis on the mission of the University. I suspect my dad would be proud of me, but just as proud of what Lewis has become and is becoming in these last few years.

I spent my four and a half undergraduate years at Lewis studying history. I have come to better understand the importance of knowing and correctly preserving our past. We arrived at Lewis during a crucial time in the history of this school. Lewis was redefining its purpose and its mission, in light of what faces this institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it adapts to the needs of a diverse body of student learners. It is intriguing too note that Lewis looked back to its origins to plan its future.

Lewis has made its commitment to its Lasallian heritage a high priority. In this, Br. James has led the way. The faculty, in the true spirit of De La Salle, have committed themselves to students in ways that exceed the traditional teacher-student relationship. They are mentors, counselors, and friends. What they teach, expressing the mission values of knowledge and wisdom, is enriched by how they teach, the value of association.

Whether you lived in the residence hall or commuted to Romeoville or to one of the satellite campuses, it is evident that Lewis is not just a University, but it strives to be a community. The spirit of association, a realization that we are all in this together, moving towards the same goals of quality education is found in the departmental unity that was the key to my growth as a student learner at Lewis.

The professors of the history department share a common bond with their students love for the past as a key to the future. The students are challenged to be historians, whose opinions are valued and respected. I hope you have experienced this in *your* field of studies.

Lewis has not only given to me. It has also called upon me to give. I have been privileged to serve as an officer in the Student Governing Board, as a member of several committees and councils and as a leader of our retreat program. Each of these involvements is an expression of what has been *my* Lasallian heritage. Each of you share in that heritage.

Lewis is sponsored by the Christian Brothers, who have dedicated their lives to carrying on the teachings of St. John Baptist De La Salle. It is from the Brothers that Lewis has received its identity, an identity that continues through us.

De La Salle wrote: "Rest assured that you will do good in this work only in so far as you are filled with faith, conduct yourself by the Spirit of Faith."

This University is committed to its Lasallian heritage and to its students. As graduates, we are called to spread the Lasallian values that have touched our lives during our time here

Congratulations and go with God