

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May, 2007
Presented by: Amy A. Hergert

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

When I first applied to Lewis four and a half years ago, I could never have imagined all that my college career would offer to me. I never realized how much I would change and how much more than just a degree Lewis would give me. Lewis gave me a passion for Justice and a profound understanding of what it means to help those in need. Lewis also helped me choose a career that combined these two aspects of my experience in college. I have wanted to be a lawyer since I was in junior high school but justice took on a whole new meaning during my time at Lewis. Justice is often considered only in a judicial sense when people want restitution for a crime or wrongdoing, but the line in the Pledge of Allegiance says “Liberty and Justice for All.” It does not say that justice only applies to getting a conviction, but rather says justice for all which has a much broader application.

At Lewis, I learned other perspectives of justice when I started volunteering through University Ministry. Before this I had only heard about the homeless, the hungry, and the poor, but had never seen the full implications of these conditions first hand. My first trip to Morning Star Mission was an eye opener. The people I saw there were no different than anybody else. There were men, women, and even children. The people I saw had families just like me. It was then that I realized that justice was about more than just catching a criminal, but that justice was about making sure that everyone in the world has equal opportunities. The people I saw at Morning Star Mission were not

able to provide the basic needs for themselves, but here I was with more than enough food to eat and more clothes than I could wear in a month. Many people often overlook those who are struggling, but it was during my short time at Morning Star that I realized that overlooking or looking down on the people from the streets or in shelters would be a great injustice to them and the world.

I don't mean to imply that justice in the judicial sense is not important but the broader meaning of the term justice has been too often overlooked. Sometimes we forget that a person is innocent until proven guilty, but rather as soon as someone is arrested, we jump to the conclusions that the person is in fact the one who did the crime. I learned this lesson the hard way recently at the Brother David Darst retreat. During the retreat we went to a homeless shelter for men who were out on parole or had recently been released from prison. During this visit, we had an opportunity to sit down and talk with the men at the shelter. One of the men had found out that I wanted to be a lawyer and so he was excited to tell me his story. The man, who now gives lectures on his story, had been convicted of a crime many years ago and eyewitness testimony was the main factor in his conviction. After he spent ten years in prison, the eyewitness stepped forward and admitted that she was told to identify him as the perpetrator but in fact, he did not even fit the description of the man she saw. He was released from prison, but still was labeled as a criminal in the eyes of many. This story really touched my heart because I had always sided with the prosecution and assumed guilt before I knew the facts. I had forgotten about justice for the wrongfully accused. In this man's case, no justice had been served because the real criminal had never been brought to trial.

The word justice encompasses so many things. Justice is the struggle to help those in need and justice is the righting of wrongs that have been done. Justice is more than a powerful word but rather a lifestyle that one must strive to achieve. “With Liberty and Justice for All.” If I were preparing this speech of the Mock Trial team, I would tell you that in legal terms, today’s commencement ceremony is the closing argument to our college careers, but also the opening statement to the rest of our lives. As we leave the comfort of Lewis today, I hope that we never forget all that Lewis has taught us and we continue to hold the mission values of Lewis in high esteem.

Congratulations, fellow graduates!