

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December 2011
Presented by: Karen Joy Dizon

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

Mary Oliver, an American poet concludes one of her poems with this line. "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" I think it is safe to assume that most of us gathered here today experienced times in which we were apprehensive of the unknown future. This probing question invites all of us to recall the times in our lives in which we stood at a crossroads discerning what our interests were, what to possibly major in, and most importantly, what to do with the rest of our lives.

Exactly three semesters ago, I transferred to Lewis University after studying at a community college. As a junior double majoring in Theology and Art, I quickly appreciated the dedication and passion I saw amongst the professors within the two departments. I think we can all appreciate how inspirational it is to be in a class where the professor creates a nurturing environment in which students are challenged intellectually, as well as encouraged to implement their knowledge outside the traditional classroom setting. This past June I had an experience that helped me integrate my learning through the Mission Value of Wisdom. I participated in The Diocesan Mission Trip to Sucre, Bolivia.

As I travelled with twenty other students, together we immersed ourselves in a new culture in hopes that the mission trip would positively benefit and serve children who are poverty stricken. I quickly realized that each and every moment challenged me.

On the first day, the director of one of the daycare centers inquired if our group was interested in creating a mural on one of the exterior walls of a building. We were told that the children spent the majority of their day on site and creating a colorful mural would enrich the appearance and atmosphere of the daycare center. Since I was the only student

on the trip who felt comfortable drawing, I naturally took on the role of creating the designs. This commitment soon progressed as I encouraged and assisted other students to participate in the process.

Creativity fuels me, however I never imagined that my efforts in Sucre would revolve around art. To my surprise, one mural quickly became four. But because of the workload, I missed opportunities to distribute new clothes to the children and assist them with their lessons. I was envious of the other students because they substantially shared more quality time with the children in comparison to me. I wrestled with this idea of what service should look like. It was not until the last day that I truly realized the impact my art had on others. When it was time for goodbyes, one of the workers thanked me for all my efforts on the murals. She told me that everyday at work when she walks by them, she will think of me. She took my hand, gave me a bracelet she had made, and said, “corazon” -you will always be in my heart.

It was in Sucre that the knowledge I gained from my academics came to life in the form of wisdom. I understood better how to integrate my talents with my passion to serve. As I reflect on the last days of the mission trip, I remember thinking to myself that the purpose of the murals was not to paint within the lines or to use the right colors; instead the purpose was seen in the words and actions displayed amongst the children. Their smiles ran from cheek to cheek, and their faces lit up whenever they were near the murals. Seeing this was the verification I needed that our collective efforts instilled a sense of hope, embraced the dignity of the children, and clarified my own life direction.

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" As I again reference Mary Oliver's thought provoking question, I challenge you to view this next chapter in your life as exciting and full of possibilities. To some degree, yet again, we are all at a crossroads. The difference between who we were before we started college and who we are now is that we have a better understanding of what we want out of life.

So as we obtain our diplomas and say goodbye to homework and exams, how will we proceed? For some of us, the next step in the journey might take us to a new internship, job, or graduate school. And some of us here today, might still be discerning carefully just what to do next. Regardless of what we do after graduation, there is one question we should all be thinking about... How will we integrate what we have learned at Lewis into both our professional and our personal lives? The decision is in our hands. Recognize the opportunities that present themselves, and most importantly, enjoy your one wild and precious life. Best wishes to you all, Class of December, 2011.