

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 2016
Presented by: Tala Zubi

Good afternoon members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family, and friends. I would like to thank you all for helping us today to celebrate this monumental occasion.

My past four years here at Lewis, like many of yours, have been a journey of self-discovery, growth, and intellectual integrity. My path at Lewis actually began in Spain and now is ending with you today. I went from a shy and nervous freshman who had no idea where the academic science building was to standing on this stage as a graduate who is proud to be a part of this Lasallian community.

As mentioned, my educational journey began when I was part of a university sponsored study abroad program in Spain, back in the summer of 2012, which began to shape who I am today. I was accompanied by a group of students, faculty, and staff; all of whom were women, except for the one gentleman. The highlight of this trip, in my opinion, took place when we had the chance to visit two Lasallian schools; one in Barcelona and one in Madrid. At the time, I had no idea what Lasallian even meant, except for the fact that I was going to be attending a Catholic and Lasallian school. This was my introduction into what it truly means to be Lasallian and what it means to respond to a need.

Another pivotal moment in my growing awareness of being Lasallian was an opportunity to participate in a service project known as Feed My Starving Children. At that site, we hand-pack meals specifically formulated for malnourished children. While it was easy to package meals for hungry children overseas, this activity held a greater meaning for me. From that moment, something changed within me. It was then that I saw a need and felt the desire to respond to the needs of people who are less fortunate than I am. This act of service allowed me to make a difference in the lives of others as well as represent the values of our Mission. The university, in its wisdom, required us to participate in this service project in the hope that we would grow into the sense of our Lasallian mission and want to make a difference, and it worked for me.

During my second year, an influential experience took place when I attended a skype session with students from Bethlehem University in Palestine. Lewis University students received an email stating that University Ministry and the Theology department were coordinating this event, but I really did not think much of it. However, I decided to attend, and to my surprise, by the end of the event, I was in tears. After skyping with several students who told of their struggles to continue their education due to factors beyond their control, I took pause. I did not realize how blessed I was to attend a Catholic and Lasallian institution, regardless of the fact that I myself was not Catholic. Attending this event encouraged me to respond.

These students were attending a Lasallian institution just as I did, but did not live with the same freedom that I was given. This inspired me to start an organization on campus called Students for Justice in Palestine whose purpose is to raise awareness about the struggles of the Palestinian people. Seeing other students here at Lewis get involved and want to learn more about the obstacles that people worldwide face brought me great joy, and the members continue to want to learn more about the struggles of the Palestinian people.

This need to respond is not limited to other countries or even other states. There are chances to respond to needs right in our own communities, even within this university. As a Chemistry major, I have been involved in organizations where we coordinated events at local schools to help educate students within the field of science. While these events were filled with fun and games, we also saw a need and instinctively responded to it. Making a difference in peoples' lives does not require money, but simply patience, time, and a desire to make a difference.

For example, these exact qualities were portrayed by someone who I truly look up to and someone who always responded to the needs of students without having to think twice. This person, who happened to be my research mentor, Dr. Jason Keleher has shown me what it means to be Lasallian. I would not be the student I am today without the time and effort he has invested in me and my classmates. In times of need, I always had a professor to go to and ask questions, a research mentor to be challenged and frustrated by, and I will always have a friend to go to, who at times knew me better than I knew myself. His response has always kept me pushing towards my goal, and to always make the most out of life no matter what situation I am put in, and for that I am grateful to him.

Throughout my years at Lewis, I have grown to appreciate the University's Mission and values even more because of the students, faculty and staff that surrounded me. They all portrayed what it truly meant to be Lasallian when I saw them respond to the needs of others.

We most often respond to someone who sets an example for us, and what better example to have than our very own President, Brother James Gaffney. For those of us who have had the chance of knowing Brother James, we realize that he truly models what it means to be Lasallian.

So, on behalf of the class of 2016, I would like to thank you Brother James for your 28 years of service, devotion, and empowerment to this University. Your commitment and dedication to the students will be truly missed, but we can treasure our many memories of you and even your willingness to put up with the bobble heads.

My friends, while today may be the end of this chapter in our lives, it is the start of a whole new beginning. As we leave today, we begin new ventures, and a new part of our journey. But what we don't leave behind is our Lasallian heritage. Make your mark and be proud that you are a graduate of Lewis University. We have been gifted and blessed to attend this university, and now it is our turn to be that person who responds to a need, who takes responsibility, and who is willing to serve others. As Martin Luther King said, "Not everybody can be famous, but everyone can be great because greatness is determined by service."

Our obligation now is to continue the Lasallian tradition, and to leave the world a better place than we found it. Be proud, be true, and be Lasallian.

Class of 2016, WE DID IT!

Congratulations, good luck, and God bless.