

Welcoming Remarks of President Feroe Undergraduate Ceremony – 2008

It is an honor to gather here today to celebrate the accomplishments of the Mercy College Class of 2008 with your parents, spouses, families, and friends who have helped make this happen, as well as the faculty and the entire Mercy College community.

Commencement gives us all the opportunity to honor what is the best of our College—an extraordinary graduating class educated by a dedicated and spirited faculty.

Graduates, we are so very proud of you.

You are here today because you have developed essential skills and demonstrated in-depth knowledge of your chosen academic disciplines. And I have no doubt that, in your efforts to reach this important milestone, each of you has learned other things as well—at least these two—the value of setting an example and the value of persistence.

During your tenure as Mercy students, many of you have weathered personal life challenges—juggling families, jobs, and schoolwork. You did this for a variety of reasons...to get promotions; to improve as people; or, in many cases, to set examples for your siblings, children, and others. Many of you are the first in your families to earn college degrees. You have set a new standard for your loved ones. That is an accomplishment that will resonate for the rest of your lives. By earning diplomas, you created or continued a tradition that will forever affect your families.

Many of you also created or continued Mercy traditions. The College's motto is *Inserviendo Comsumere* – to be consumed in service. The Class of 2008 has lived that motto and by doing so added to the value of a Mercy education.

Among us are students from all our campuses who ran food pantry drives and coat drives, participated in walks against domestic violence, helped collect books for needy children, and even appeared on TV “Rock the Vote” specials.

We also have students who have distinguished themselves academically in programs like McNair Scholars, Model UN, college scholars, conflict resolution to name just a few. Your efforts brought Mercy College recognition and kept open doors of opportunity.

Your ability to handle personal responsibilities while contributing to the growth of our institution is your legacy to us. Future classes will look at your example and be inspired to match your efforts. You did not make one improvement and stop. You continued to add to our College in big ways and small, and you should be proud.

Mercy College's legacy to you is not just your degree, but the attitude of mind that enables you to benefit from your education – namely persistence.

Persistence is perhaps one of the most important lessons any of us can learn. And you can be certain it is something we learn over and over again throughout our lives.

President Calvin Coolidge said this on the topic:

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not.... Genius will not.... Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent. The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

What has allowed you to achieve this excellence is your persistence.

The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

The dramatic advances in technology that have so thoroughly altered our daily lives and practices come with many benefits, all of which form an important aspect of a Mercy education. But the heart of the Mercy experience remains its liberal arts focus, for it is through literature, philosophy and the arts that we learn to reflect on our world and re-imagine it.

- When we focus on our struggles, we begin to see how to overcome them;
- When we focus on beauty, we start to discover it in more people and experiences;
- And when we focus on the problems in our neighborhood or in the world, we take a step towards changing them.

Writing and reading are generative processes-- they help us reach the depth of our thoughts and feelings and to develop new understandings that become the foundation of our actions and our choices. Given how quickly the world is changing, it is vital that we regularly take time to reflect on and share our understandings and experiences, for at many of the crucial crossroads in our lives we are given little time to think before we act. The wisdom we gain through creative action enriches our lives and our world in ways that we can never anticipate, and in ways that no feat of computer programming could ever hope to approximate.

As newly minted college graduates you are taking your place among the future leaders of your communities, nation—and, in fact, the world.

Your persistence—of body, mind, and spirit—will serve you well.

But *now* how will you determine and measure your future goals and accomplishments?

How will you, in other words, use your education to realize, and make concrete, the purpose of your life?

As Mercy's President, I often extol the virtues of the liberal arts education you received at Mercy College, because I believe that the primary goal of education is to teach us how to *live better lives* and, in so doing, create a better world.

Education is about more than acquiring knowledge; it is about finding wisdom—knowing how to use knowledge for the greater good.

Let me give you an example with a story of my own journey: More than 35 years ago, while studying in Edinburgh, I volunteered in an elementary school in a working class neighborhood.

On my first day, the principal proudly gave me a tour of her school, and pointed out several students: She pointed to a boy on the playground and said “that one won't go to college.” She pointed to another student and said “but this one may.”

These were 7 year old children; but she defended her predictions with talk of home life and other social factors – and most likely she was right. But she never mentioned the qualities we see every day at Mercy: motivation, commitment or leadership. I left the elementary school that day thinking about the labels these children were carrying. As a visitor, I never got to see what became of those boys and girls, but it was clear, they weren't “perfect”.

And I carried them with me to Mercy College. I share it with you to explain the tyranny of predictions and how Mercy College changes lives by encouraging students to move beyond sociological expectations. We're not about having “perfect” students. Mercy College has always valued desire and perseverance. We don't read labels. We provide opportunities. What we expect of students is that you are motivated, committed to your goals and that you use their experiences to lead others to find their own success.

Mercy College matters. We are making a difference. You have created your own success by taking part in a rigorous academic program, by staying committed to your goals – and at Mercy you have found a community where your leadership skills might flourish. Mercy College makes all the difference for you by encouraging you to exceed expectations, to surprise us with the power of your motivation, commitment and leadership. And because of this, we should all be proud.

You have achieved great things, and we look forward to many more great achievements.

Persistence clearly is not overrated.... Look around you today.

In fact, it is persistence that separates the “wannabes” from the successes.

In my career as an educator, it is fair to say that the difference between the student who fails and the valedictorian is

NOT intelligence

NOT the teacher, curriculum, etc.

BUT persistence

The “persisters” aim high but they are realists: they know that success in anything takes hard work

No one is entitled to it

No one maintains it by place of birth

No one achieves it in any field without hard work.

No one starts out “perfect” or maintains “perfection”

You can’t achieve something and then stop. Soon that achievement will be gone, and you will wonder where it went or what it meant...

Your success in College demonstrates that you have learned part of that lesson – now you need to take that knowledge to the next step. I’m here to tell you that you cannot stop now, excellence and success are ongoing processes.

The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

In each endeavor you undertake, you need to do the work, find out what is required and then meet those requirements and more.... There is nothing easy about achievement, but the good news is that everyone can do it.

You need to move beyond the specific “things” you have learned to the general art of persistence in everything you attempt.

Wanting it enough

Sustaining interest

Working hard at each piece

Not getting discouraged

Never thinking that anything asked of you is beneath you – hence doing everything well.

That’s what you learned here – even if you didn’t notice, but notice now and keep on keeping on!

Success will be yours.

As college graduates, you have attained knowledge, and with it, you have attained power.

Your degree gives you the power to expand your horizons, advance in your careers, and influence others.

As your power in the world increases, so too, does the responsibility you carry. You must learn how to use power responsibly, and for the good of others as well as yourselves. This is the road to *wisdom*.

This is the road you are on—and the journey will take you your whole life.

It is my privilege to recognize this important milestone in your lives, as your college degree is conferred upon you today; it represents how far you have already traveled on the *road to wisdom*.

I urge you to persist on your path toward wisdom as you continue to achieve personal, professional, and additional educational success.

To act responsibly in a world—where there is too much division and intolerance—you must use your knowledge to *wield your power wisely*.

Remember what you have learned throughout your Mercy education:

- evaluate the sources of what you read or hear;
- explore alternative explanations;
- determine for yourself what you believe to be the truth.
- And then *persist* in acting on that truth.

DON'T STAND STILL! ACT!

Your actions thus far have influenced many people—your parents, spouses, partners, children, friends, and communities. Only you get to decide the nature of that influence going forward. Use your power wisely.

In helping you to realize your goals today, your loved ones and the faculty at Mercy College have used their power wisely.

Let's take a moment to celebrate our connections.

I would like to ask the entire Mercy College faculty and staff rise. Please remain standing.

Now would all the spouses, parents, children and friends of the graduates stand as well. Please remain standing.

And last but not least, will the graduates of the Mercy College Class of 2008 rise.

Graduates, look around you at the wall of support. Together with the assistance and encouragement of all these people, you have reached this momentous day.

Graduates, this day honors your hard work and your power of persistence. Tomorrow, and for all your tomorrows, I hope you will show us the power of your wisdom.

Congratulations!