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## Remarks, delivered at the Memorial Service for Sibert Martens on December 7, 1992

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MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR SIBERT MARTENS-12-7-92.

I remember a Christmas party, standing before a crackling fire, the winter of 1969 I believe, an exuberant man, sparkling eyes, good humor written permanently on his face, came up to me "You're Dr. Lubbers son," he said as he grabbed my arm. "Your father preached every summer at Lakeshore Chapel. I've known him for 25 years." That was my first encounter with Bert Martens, the first pleasant moment of many pleasant hours to come. Before we separated he, in his charming way, had persuaded me to preach at the Lakeshore Chapel the next summer, adding the inducement of a Bobbie-prepared luncheon and an afternoon at the beach. From that day Nancy and I knew we had found two good friends. Bert and Bobbie, devoted to each other, were devoted to their family and friends as well. It didn't matter how long an interlude between visits; the warmth and fun were immediate.

We are here to celebrate Bert's life. We wish he were here, but he isn't. And there is nothing we can do about that so we will make the best of the situation. The best of the situation is to remember Bert. I am sure Bert was not perfect, but I am equally certain that the memories each of us has are positive, filled with experiences that make us happy, that often make us chuckle. With his compassion for people and his sense of humor, it is not surprising that he was superb at customer relations during his days in the retail business. By the time Bert was finished with you, you were happy about yourself, about him, and about the world around you. What a gift!

There were some qualities I particularly liked about Bert, He

had zest. Even when his body didn't function the way he thought it should, his spirit didn't flag. There was always something good and fun to try; always something to do for someone or a good word to be said and encouragement to be given. In his 80's, he decided to earn an MBA degree at Grand Valley. That demonstrates his constant search for interesting, positive activity. When the driving to campus became too demanding for him to continue the course, we decided to confer an honorary Masters Degree in Business on Bert. In fact, with his experience, he had more to teach than learn anyway, so he deserved the degree.

Nancy and I drove to Bert and Bobbie's one Saturday afternoon. With me I had a diploma, an academic robe and cap for Bert, and all my Presidential academic regalia. We dressed Bert appropriately and I, properly attired for an academic ceremony, conferred the degree. In conferring a degree, the President of the university always cites the recipient. Today I would like to cite Bert again in the same words I did at that ceremony at his apartment with Bobbie, Skip, Nancy, Bert, and me in attendance.

"Sibert Martens, through your long life you have exhibited the qualities that brought love from your family and friends, respect from business colleagues, and admiration from those who worked with you in charitable endeavors. Yours is a spirit that elicits kindness, generosity, and good humor from others because you possess those qualities in abundance. Wherever you are, wherever you have passed by, life is brighter and happier

for your presence. There is a constant striving to be civilized and human, to be courageous and wise, a striving so often thwarted by the dark side of human nature. By nature, a happy marriage, favorable genes, and determined will, your striving is more successful than most. For those of us who observe you, we see unusual achievement toward the goal of becoming what a human being should be.

Long after most people deactivate themselves, you continued to pursue, to grow in mind and spirit. Grand Valley State University recognizes your commitment to life, your pursuit of knowledge, and your generous spirit by conferring on you the degree Master of Business Administration, honoris causa."

I am happy I had an opportunity to say those words to Bert, to have an occasion where I could tell him how I felt about his life, work, and relationships.

In closing, I want to refer to what I think was Bert's greatest achievement, one he shared with Bobbie. Together they lived and defined what marriage should be. All of us who have good marriages still can benefit by observing and reflecting on what Bert and Bobbie had together. It was love with the right combination of sentimentality and practicality. It was undeniable loyalty and fidelity. It was companionship, a sharing of mutual enjoyments. They were lovers and friends with a formula for being both that worked.

When something is so good, it is hard to give it up. This separation is especially difficult because the togetherness was so good. But in our condition, human life ends, and when we accept that, and reconcile ourselves to it, then it is better to have glorious, happy memories to sustain us. What Bert and Bobbie did for one another, the life they lived together will fill Bobbie's mind for the rest of her life, and she will know in her heart that she and Bert succeeded in that demanding, difficult, and rewarding relationship of two people sharing their lives with one another called marriage. They succeeded far beyond the capacity of most people's achievement in that holy estate.

Bert's life was long and full of that which is best. His priorities were right, and because they were, his life was a series of good relationships, beginning with the most important one with Bobbie. Today each of us is here because we had our place in his life's relationships. He was a special man, and we had an opportunity to share experiences with him. That is a reason for gratitude and celebration.