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2015 Valedictory Address: Nicholas R. Cormier '15

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2015 Valedictory Address - Nicholas R. Cormier '15

May 22, 2015



Mr. Stevenson, Bishop McManus, President Boroughs, Senior Vice President Vellaccio, Dean Freije, Dean Anderson, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honored Guests, Faculty and Staff, Parents, Relatives and Friends, Fellow Members of the Class of 2015.

Have you ever considered the amount of time you spend waiting? Waiting for a coffee at Cool Beans (5 minutes), waiting for a sandwich at the Science Café (10 minutes), waiting for an omelet at Kimball (15 minutes)...if no one else is in line, that is. Waiting to graduate (4 years). We are constantly living in a world, though, that tells us not to wait. Stop signs are nuisances. Railroad crossings are inconveniences. 45-minute lines for that Sunday-morning omelet that you just have to have are unnecessary delays. We live in world that tells us not to wait, an age of immediate responses to text messages, and apps like Tapingo (or Tap-n-go) that enable us to bypass waiting altogether. No waiting. No waiting. No waiting! In this life of go, go, go, today I invite you to consider the benefit of stopping and waiting. Let me tell you two stories to show you why you might consider this request.

First, there is transformation in the waiting. I will say it again: there is transformation in the waiting. I was volunteering in the Emergency Room over winter break. My job entailed guiding people through the labyrinth of corridors in the hospital. I am a strong proponent of efficiency, and navigating quickly was my specialty. A woman approached me in the ER carrying a bag of belongings, and asked for help getting back to her car on the other side of the hospital. "Problem solved, ma'am," I said. "You have asked the right person." I began to walk briskly, but she trailed behind. "I am going to need you to slow down," she exclaimed. "I can't keep up." I slowed, but so did she and I still found myself a lap ahead of her in this race to the exit. "Slow down," she persisted. I thought to myself with frustration, "At this pace we will never get there." The exit for her car was just another 2 minutes away, but she said to me, "we need to stop." "But why," I thought. "We are almost there—just one flight of stairs, just two more elevators, just three more corridors." But she said we needed to stop?

I stopped and I learned. The bag she was carrying contained the belongings of her recently deceased mother, who had just passed in the ER. She was unable to keep up, still breathless from the shock. For the first time that morning, I stopped and I waited. I was in such a hurry I thought finding her car, the end goal, was most important. After having lost my own mother only a few months prior, her story resonated with me. We sat together, stopped halfway to our destination. I do not even remember how long we stayed, and even without words we understood each other. The distance from one end of Baystate Medical Center to the other is 230 steps, and to me, that was always a journey to be taken in one chunk—no stops, no waiting. On this day, only halfway there, I learned an invaluable lesson. You see, only in stopping and waiting was I able to be present, truly present, to the person right in front of me.

As Holy Cross students, we see an end goal and work unceasingly to reach it. I would like you to consider where on that journey you are actually missing opportunities to stop, to abandon the script, to stray off the path etched in the map. There is power in stopping. If you stop, you may discover that the lives you intersect, the places in which you take pause, and, in my case, the people with whom you just stop and sit are more important than where you were going in the first place!

Would you believe me if I told you that taking the time to stop, taking a detour from the road you were speeding along, could even save a life? I learned this over the past year when I interviewed for my thesis forty-five of the most interesting people I have ever met, all people who have donated an organ, received an organ, or engineered the transplant process itself. I spoke to one recipient in particular, a firefighter, who explained the experience of having his passion put on hold—stopped—as the result of illness. He had been diagnosed with kidney failure fifteen years earlier. But he added, "I AM A FIGHTER." Curious, I asked, "WHY are you a fighter?" He looked at me. "My donor," he replied. "I am a firefighter. I would go into a twelve-story burning building to save your life. That is how we think. You just do it. We do not think about ourselves. That is what it was like for my donor." He continued to say, "I got blessed that I had someone who went out of their way unselfishly. She basically saved my life, but she did not just save me. She saved a dad, a family friend, a neighbor. Everybody's life was changed, not just mine." At the end of my conversation with this recipient, he encouraged me to find an interview filmed by a local news station so I could hear more from his donor's perspective. A few words come to mind to describe her: a mother, a co-worker, an authentic and humble person, even a superhero. Most of all, she was present, truly present, to the needs of the world, to the people right in front of her, and in this instant, to this firefighter.

My conversation that day was twenty-one minutes and twenty-nine seconds. It was time well-spent sitting and listening. I learned about a donor who put her life, her goals, her career on hold to give a kidney to someone about whom she knew very little. In being willing to stop, she could live selflessly. I saw the impact that her decision to stop had on her kidney's recipient. She gave a kidney, but she also gave a new perspective, and a willingness to fight, to someone experiencing tremendous adversity. If you are unwilling to stop and wait, you may discover that you are living for yourself. But when you stop, when you wait, when you listen, you live for (and with) others.

Will you choose to live in a way that enables you to stop and be truly present to the people right in front of you? If you are willing to stop regardless of where you are on your journey, you may discover that the people you meet and the experiences you have are even more important than where you are going in the first place. I will conclude with an excerpt from a prayer by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin of the Society of Jesus, "Patient Trust."

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress

that it is made by passing through some stages of instability

and that it may take a very long time. “

Class of 2015, I look forward to seeing the amazing achievements you will surely accomplish, but perhaps more importantly, I look forward to hearing the stories of where you have stopped along the way. Thank you.