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2014 Valedictory Address: Jeffrey Reppucci '14

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2014 Valedictory Address - Jeffrey Reppucci '14

May 23, 2014



Thank you Mr. Favreau, Bishop McManus, President Boroughs, Senior Vice President Vellaccio, Dean Freije, Dean Levine, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honored Guests, Faculty and Staff, Parents, Relatives and Friends, Fellow Members of the Class of 2014

I am deeply humbled to stand here before my classmates, their families, and the college community today to represent the class of 2014. We have been anticipating this day since August 28, 2010 when we all drove up to Mulledy, Hanselman, or Wheeler Halls, to have our cars attacked by crazed upperclassman orientation leaders with painted faces and purple bandanas. That was a crazy day. Unpacking, meeting new roommates, making eye-contact with strangers in the hallway who would soon become some of our best friends. Holy Cross may have felt quite new and large in that moment, but we all would soon discover how tight our campus community is, where word travels much faster than we would like... One thing that I do remember loud and clear from that day is a phrase I saw written on hallway posters, on the cover of our arrival folders, and on the t-shirts of each one of those enthusiastic crusaders in purple-face. The phrase read, "Live the Mission!" I remember briefly thinking to myself, "What does that mean? What is a mission"?

The next day at orientation, we learned what the mission was-- another phrase-- "Men and women for and with others." I am proud to say that we stand here today as a class that has just spent four years embodying that phrase. We have volunteered for thousands of hours across our city, tutoring in classrooms and leading after-school programs; we have cleaned up parks, built playgrounds, and participated in the development of our city through volunteer days such as Holy Cross Cares Day and Working for Worcester; we have befriended peers with intellectual and developmental disabilities through social events and athletic contests in HC Goes Unified or in impassioned hockey tilts against the East Coast Jumbos; we have administered IVs and medical examinations in Honduras and have traveled to Alabama, Kentucky, and many more places to work with local communities through spring-break immersion programs. You see, I can go on and on about the ways that we have answered that call to serve that we first saw written on our orientation leaders' t-shirts four years ago.

But we know that this service is not entirely selfless. Holy Cross has grounded our experiences in reflection, which has allowed us to appreciate the benefits that come to us with serving in our communities. We can appreciate that our service gives us interpersonal enrichment through working with others. The benefits go so much further than the cliché of "feel good work". We expand our understanding of the world; we become empowered as active citizens; and we receive a great spiritual benefit from our work with others. Spiritually, we not only grow, but we develop conviction in our thoughts and actions, and we become inspired by the very people that we serve to be better in our community presence and our professional and personal pursuits. Our service has been and must always be valued and understood as a fundamental and multi dimensional characteristic of our human experience, where we not only better our world through service, but also ourselves.

Through our service experiences, we have proved that we can be men and women for and with others; however, my concern for us now, the class of 2014, is how do we continue to live and cultivate our mission in the next stages of our lives? What does living the mission look like next year, or in graduate school? What does it look like at the age of 30? What does it look like when we have families, bills, and weeks or months when there is not even time to pick up the phone and keep in touch with the friends that we are sitting with right now?

These are questions that we must consider, so that this afternoon we may say goodbye to Holy Cross the place, but not Holy Cross the mission. The truth is that we have served over the past four years in an environment where service opportunities have been overwhelmingly accessible, encouraged, and socially relevant. Holy Cross carved out time and resources for us to explore the concept of mission through experiences such as Appalachia, CBL classes, international service internships, and tutoring programs. Next year's high stress, deadline driven office climate or rigorous law school curriculum, won't carve time out for us to serve or direct our attention to those who need our talents most. Furthermore, we will not have as much space in our lives to receive the gifts of our service and grow spiritually. Here at Holy Cross, we were presented with spiritual retreats and reflective programs, such as Montserrat, to help us understand our role in social justice issues and to grow from our service experiences. I think it's safe to say that next year in corporate America or graduate school, there won't be weeklong silent retreats every quarter for us to reflect on our understanding of faith and justice.

Starting tomorrow, we enter a new lifestyle and environment, in which the time and resources for service and reflection are not readily available. In many ways, we also enter a world that orders priorities differently. A world where success is measured in terms of professional ambition, material wealth, and status. Martin Luther King commented on this dilemma, when he said, "We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobiles, rather than by the quality of our service and relationship to humanity." In this world, where priorities shift to profitability and productivity, how can we make sure that we continue to stay aware of the social justice issues in our lives and in the lives of those whom we cannot see from our office and apartment windows or those whom we do not pass on our walk to work? How do we chase our professional and personal dreams, while finding God and spiritual discernment in our thoughts and actions?

I hope I do not seem pessimistic. In fact, I feel the exact opposite. I believe that our experiences here at Holy Cross give us the values and perspectives to live our mission through every subsequent stage of our lives, in moments of stability and in the face of great challenges. And I say our mission, because we have also learned at Holy Cross and through the example of Ignatian living that service has an infinite number of meanings and applications. One does not have to work for a non-profit or give all of one's money away to live a life of service.

So what does this type of spiritual discernment look like in the real world? I will give you three real-life examples of fellow Holy Cross alumni who have found a way to pursue their vocational aspirations and personal ambitions, while making time to share their talents and resources with those who need them most. First, a powerful Wall Street executive who serves on the board of the Nativity School in the South Bronx and volunteers one weekend every month as an EMT in his local community. Second, a 27-year-old lawyer at one of the largest real-estate firms in the country, who makes time for weekly pro bono work to help single mothers fight unjust evictions and uses his scholarly talents to publish articles advocating for stronger property rights among the poor in South African slums. Lastly, a pediatrician and professor at Harvard Medical School, who not only practices medicine and researches clinical care, but she also volunteers monthly at an inner city free-clinic and helps organize fundraising events for the Wounded-Warriors project.

All three of these alumni have pursued and achieved success in ambitious careers that require a great deal of their energy and talents; however, all of them, in their own unique ways, consistently find additional time and energy to stay connected to the people and causes that they care about. They don't just give money, they give their time, and most inspiring is how they give their talents to serve and be present in their local and global communities. And I am sure that their personal and spiritual lives are deeply enriched by these experiences. These examples of our fellow alumni show that service is relative and personal. Service is neither too big nor too small. Service is taking the time to notice and reflect on the needs and injustices in our society and to act on them. Service is not one-size fits all, but it is a life-long discernment. Now let us, the class of 2014, venture beyond the gates of this campus and live our mission together. Thank you.

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