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Student Lasallian Commencement Address

May 2018

Presented by: Haley Renison

Good Afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Livingston, honored guests, faculty, staff, graduates, parents, and friends; I am honored to be speaking today.

I'll begin by describing the "glazed doughnut." This is a phenomenon I'm willing to bet those of you in the College of Arts are well acquainted with. And it is the reaction from people when you tell them about your major. Allow me to demonstrate, "Hi I'm Haley I'm studying Theology with a minor in Peace Studies." This is what follows: said person looks at you with his or her mouths slightly ajar, head tilted to the side and replies with something along the lines of, "Oh that's nice" as their eyes kind of glaze over—hence the term. Look familiar?

I have to say, despite receiving that look at least a couple hundred times in the last four years, I've remained confident in my ability to make a career out of my passions. I got into Theology, for a few reasons: the first being I realized very early on that the STEM path was not for me. I can expertly recite the mitochondria is the powerhouse of a cell but that is about the extent of my knowledge. Second, I chose to study theology because I love that I got to study something that I'm passionate about.

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Another joyful experience of community unfolded when I found myself, in the beautiful country of New Zealand last July. There, I attended an international Lasallian women's symposium. It was my first time traveling out of the country on my own, which was both invigorating and empowering. I spent time with women from around the globe who were unapologetically themselves. They took pride in their culture, their Lasallian roots and their unique individuality. They taught me that we should never be ashamed of who we are, and that we always have one another to rely on.

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Community is simply authentic human connection. And this is what I want all of us to remember as we leave here today: We are not in this alone.

We become better pilots, lawyers, doctors, scientists, artists, teachers, social workers, writers, engineers...we become better employees and better humans when we are able to pause and take the time to understand the populations we are working with. Compassion and acceptance are the powerful methods by which we can all positively contribute to the world. I sincerely believe that those of us who have made the sacrifices to obtain a higher education, have done so because we couldn't just sit idly by while there are people in the world who need our help. I think it is our responsibility to continue to educate ourselves every day because when we love what we do, are passionate about our careers and go above and beyond to make other peoples' lives better, we make this world a better place.

We are a generation who takes pride in having our voices heard, we stand up for those who don't always have the ability to speak for themselves, and we strive to make our world a more peaceful place to live. It is our duty as Lasallians, regardless of our faith, but also in light of our spiritualities, to continue to serve the greater good and our world communities. So, stay in touch. Thank your families and friends. Thank the professors who made a difference, who saw your potential and nurtured it. Thank the people who lifted you up in your darkest times and told you that you are worth something. Because you are. We all are.

Thank you and congratulations Class of 2018.

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