

Christine Devine ~ Commencement Speaker 2009

Good Morning Dr. Owens, Faculty, Staff, Families, Friends and you, the graduating class of 2009! Can you believe we are finally here?

When I first thought about this speech, I did not know where to begin; so many emotions swirled around today. I wanted the message to be profound and memorable, but all that comes to my mind is the following question: Was it worth it? Was all of this, the past 4 years, worthwhile? Are we prepared?

For the past 6 months, the fact that this year I would be graduating was mentioned at almost every family gathering or major event. The question on everyone's tongue was, "How does it feel to know that you are entering your last semester?" This question always filled me with hope and excitement about the future, until one night when I was out with my cousins. Instead of the question inspiring enthusiasm, I was hit with a hard dose of reality. I was asked how it felt to know that, in the not-too-distant future, I was going to be out in cold, cruel world without a sweater. I was caught so off guard that I didn't know how to respond. Graduation, something I had been looking forward to for the past 4 years, was suddenly something very scary, and now very close. Not only was I about to leave the protection of college, I also would be leaving the safety of Gwynedd. The caring community that exists here is an anomaly outside of this campus. The thoughts that came to mind were no longer ones of freedom, but of lack of direction, until I thought about the last four years.

From the start of our time at Gwynedd, we have gone to classes, attended lectures, seminars, and common hours. We have written papers, taken exams, and given presentations, but

it was in between all of these things that we experienced what truly mattered. It was the lessons we learned outside the classroom.

We went to baseball and basketball games. We went to dances and bingos. We had all-night “pow-wows” with our friends. We had 1-1 tutoring sessions with a teacher so we could pass a final. We went to Habitat for Humanity and Manna on Main Street. This is where the real learning took place. It is here that we learned what it means to be a “Distinctive Mercy” graduate.

We learned that it matters more to be merciful and just than care who is right and wrong, that more times than not, the answer isn't just Black and White, and that what we do is more important than what we say. We learned that the people we sit next to are just as important as class we are in. We were not only made to understand what Gandhi meant when he said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world,” but while we were here, many of us started working for it as well. And we learned that the big picture is not just the community we are in, it is not just the state we are in; it goes beyond our imaginations.

These values, – not only how we will treat people and the planet, but also how we will live our lives – these are what we are taking from Gwynedd. This education will be our sweater, our protection. With our degrees in hand we are going to change the world. This is what the past 4 years has meant, and this is how we have been prepared. We are not only the new generation of nurses, teachers, respiratory therapists, congressional representatives, doctors, college directors, businessmen and women, scientists, and psychologists, but we will be the ones shaping those people who follow after us. This will be just the start of the legacy that we as “Distinctive Mercy” graduates leave. One of us could discover a cure for cancer, or the common cold; one of

us could end world hunger, or establish world peace. But even if we don't, even if we just treat others the way we want to be treated – by caring for the sick, giving food to the hungry and practicing non-violence ourselves – that would still be enough. As Barbie said, “No matter how big or small, there is a difference in this world only you can make.” What a better time to start than now. Edward Koch said, “The fireworks begin today. Each diploma is a lighted match. Each of you is a fuse.” Let's go set the world on fire! CONGRATULATIONS!!!