

LCC Convocation Speech

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Good afternoon – it is a pleasure to be here as your new president. Some of you may be wondering what it is that I can say of importance since I’ve only been here a month – what can you know in a just month after all? Well, one can know that one needs to learn a lot, just like you will be learning a lot this year as well. We start the year together with this convocation, a new tradition, but an important one that signifies a sacred beginning. I have been wondering what can I speak to you about – most convocation speeches are forgettable, important only if they are short in the minds of most people, at least to keep you awake – well, that is why I wore this regalia today, because if my speech is dull, the robe will keep you awake; it’s so bright I wanted to make sure I kept myself awake...so if nothing else, you’ll remember the new president in sun glasses trying to take the glare off his glow-in-the-dark yellow cap and gown!! And I want to introduce my wife, my love, and my full partner in life and here at LCC – Trisa. (We remove our sunglasses together.)

Having lived in China, I recall there is an old Chinese curse – “May you live in interesting times.” Indeed these are interesting times in the first decade of the 21st Century – from the dot.com collapse in 2000, to the terrorist bombings of New York and Washington, DC on 9-11, to Enron and other corporate scandals and abuses of trust, to Iraq and Afghanistan war, to elections of officials including a female president of Lithuania and a black man in the US, to the credit crisis and the failure of financial system to regulate itself, and the “Great Recession” – the largest global economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930’s – all interesting times to say the least!! So, how is that relevant to you sitting here today at this time in this place?

Three ways actually, and that is what I am going to talk about today:

First, Change

Second, Personal Transformation Choices

Third, Reflection

Many people now say we are entering a New Era of the world’s history in the last ten years – that everything is changed. Well that may or may not be true, but there is an important implication in that statement that none of us will dispute – that is the existence and primacy of CHANGE is going to be at the centerpiece of our region here in the Baltics, in our society, and in our world for the rest of time. Not long ago, a *Business Week* article was entitled, “Why do Businesses and CEOs Fail?” – it wasn’t for lack of vision, lack of support, lack of infrastructure – RATHER it was for inability to manage change. The nature of globalization is that it is all

about change – through the unstoppable integration of markets, technologies, and consumers through computer digitization, high speed communications. Well, globalization is creative destruction on steroids, and the verdict on globalization is still out in many places. We recognize all too clearly over the last year with economies in this part of the world declining over 20% that there are winners and losers in this changing environment, too, and there are inequities, elements of unfairness that need to be addressed.

POPE Benedict has recently written an encyclical analyzing modern capitalism from an ethical and spiritual perspective, as well as a technical one. It is an articulate and thoughtful response to the financial credit crisis, and strikes a chord with many of us who wish to see capitalism serve broader human ends – some of you will study that encyclical or its ideas in your classes this year. What’s interesting to me is its depth, balance and ability of drawing together faith and global economics in a thoughtful critique – *integrating faith and business*, now that is an interesting concept isn’t it? We do that here – after all at LCC where we are unabashedly Christian in our worldview, over 80% of you are business majors, who are going to lead the world with a moral foundation, just as our psychology majors, English majors, theology majors, and General Studies majors will – because your education prepares you for change that matters...

In our Changing world, you may ask – WHAT ARE THE DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE? Well, demographics is one. When I was a kid, everyone different from me lived a long way off; now they’re neighbors – and they can find out about us, good and bad, at the click of a mouse button on the internet – so, now we have 6.3 billion potentially nosy neighbors. But in this world, we also live in an age of what one person has called, “Geographic nearness with cultural distance.” A word of warning – be careful of that...

The dimensions of change not only entail demographics, but information technology as well, in the form of the advent of high speed telecommunications and the Internet. The speed of exchange of information around the world is mind-boggling. At this point in time on our globe, super-computers linked together are able to handle almost 100 million transactions/second at the speed of light. Another dimension of change is how fast money changes hands nowadays. In any one day, \$2 trillion changes hands every 24 hours with the punch of some computer keys. It used to be money would chase products, now money chases money all over the world .

We live in a borderless world as Kenichi Ohmae, famous Japanese partner in McKinsey and Company, has delineated in his books. Peter Drucker, the late famous management guru, has said that the revolution of the internet and e-commerce has eliminated distance – we live on the edge of one market; one global political economy with competition that knows no boundaries – and not just geographic boundaries, but sometimes moral boundaries, I might add.

Despite the progress technologically we’ve made, there are still some constants that exist in the dark side of the human soul. Man’s hatred for others not like him still exists; ethnic cleansing mounts, as does terrorism.

Reliable research indicates that over 150,000 Christians are martyred every year in the world, somewhere, and that there are 20 million people wandering the globe as some type of involuntary refugees – stateless and homeless.

We live in a world where even today with our progress, 400 million people live on the edge of starvation; 40% of the world lives on less than the equivalent of \$2 US/day; 1.3 billion people are without safe water to drink; 1.1 billion are without adequate shelter; 40,000 children under the age of 5 die each day from malnutrition and infection; and 1/3 of the children born in sub-Saharan Africa are born with the AIDS virus. What to do – what to do – how can we change any of that?

Time is being compressed, as well, by the speed of our society and instantaneous computer communications, such that we live not so much in the past, or in the cutting edge of the future, but rather in the demanding, irrepressible march of the PRESENT – giving many of us a paradoxical sense of timelessness or time that we cannot control. THUS, For many people, in both the developing and developed worlds, they feel that our modern, new world order, is a realm of placeless – with no real anchor in this hurricane of relentless CHANGE, and apparently no real hope amidst the poverty or even despite the wealth.

That leads to the second point of my talk – Transformation. I have news for you – you will be changed, transformed by this place, guaranteed! This is a time in your life when you will go through more growth and change than any outside of when you were a toddler. And we will change with you, as well. The key is what will you change into – someone who will be self-centered or someone who will be centered around. Someone or something else, more eternal?

Richard Foster, a Quaker theologian in Denver, Colorado has said, “The curse of this age is superficiality” – the superficiality of looks, wealth, fame. Andy Warhol, the famous American graphic artist, predicted we would live in a world of superficiality where everyone would have 15 minutes of fame - he didn’t know about the democratizing existence of YouTube back then, where everyone apparently is going to have 15 seconds of fame of some way to stick out, whether you want to or not! And it’s hard not to be superficial – it’s easy to brush off all the stimuli that are and will be coming at us this year, in and outside the classroom, by just focusing on our own selves – what makes us feel good, what entertains us and our friends, what makes us escape, feel safe and doesn’t threaten our own view of who we are...is that smart? Maybe not – maybe not because through our Christian worldview, we don’t try to make you all into little “mini-Me’s”, but rather we try to get you to see a world out there of wonder, of potential, of creation and re-creation awaiting you. I once heard a man pray, “Lord, save me from the intellectual temptation of simple solutions to complex problems.” Your education here at LCC will help reinforce what a complex world we live in, but it is a world capable of being transformed – remember that – and it can be transformed by you!

For many people who are not here today, they think the world is rigged – only the powerful, the wealthy, the well-placed, those of proper breeding and heritage can actually make it successfully. And it seems that way really after the credit crisis. Yet, we educate here at LCC for true change from the inside out, for transformation by reading, writing, talking in civil discourse, thinking, refining one’s mind, one’s spirit, and one’s hands and feet to serve a world in need of help. For you see, we foster hope in asking “Why not?” to a world that says only, “Why change?”

Cynthia Clawson, Christian singer and songwriter, wrote a verse twenty years ago that I think is relevant right now, and she said, “Let me get lost – in something bigger than myself, let me get lost in a cause for someone else; Show me the way, to set my sights on sights above, LET me get LOST IN YOUR LOVE, Lord!”

I want you to get lost this year, then find your way, and then *find yourself* not of yourself or by yourself, but as God and his agents here lead you. That’s faith to step out and explore something that you don’t know, and you can do it in a safe environment here...but be prepared, you may learn things you never knew, you may change your major, you may find a new person to love, or you may have your mind changed about someone or some group of people you had already pre-judged, and you may find out there are some things you didn’t know, but which are knowable, and then you’ll discover that there are things you’ll never know – that’s okay because knowing there are “unknowables” is the first big step in accepting your place in the world. And knowing the “knowables” is a major step in shaping the world for the better.

Speaking of knowables, though...the big knowable for you and for us as an institution this year requires self-reflection. That’s hard actually. God calls us to self-reflection – in Lamentations 3 Verses 40 and 59, in part states, “Let us examine our ways and test them...Uphold our cause.” Why is this important after all?

Socrates reputedly said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” He must have foreseen the dilemmas of the 21st Century – many of us have not carefully constructed our worldview by a personal search for truth – we rush from task to task, without enough time-outs to reflect on life’s larger meaning for us, for our purpose, who we are supposed to be in the world. Instead, we live myopically from minute-to-minute, consumed in reacting to endless stimuli that vie for our attention, money, and choices. But as Ghandi has said, “There is more to life than increasing its speed.” Real transformation is a choice that begins with each of us individually, not a reaction without reflection.

This year will probably be a year that many of you will remember as a year marked by the death of Michael Jackson, a remarkable artist...whatever you think about the man himself, we all agree he was an amazing musician, a troubling and troubled chronicler of our times. In a song entitled, Man in the Mirror, he sang these lyrics:

I've Been A Victim Of
A Selfish Kind Of Love

It's Time That I Realize
That There Are Some With No Home
Not A Nickel To Loan
Could It Be Really Me
Pretending That They're Not Alone?

A Willow Deeply Scarred
Somebody's Broken Heart
And A Washed-Out Dream
They Follow The Pattern Of
The Wind, You See
'Cause They Got No Place To Be...
That's Why I'm Starting With Me

I'm Starting With The Man In The Mirror
I'm Asking Him To Change His Ways
And No Message Could Have Been Any Clearer
If You Wanna Make The World A Better Place
Take A Look At Yourself And Then Make A Change

Words for us today, tomorrow and this year...go watch that video – it's haunting.

In Ephesians 1:18, Paul says – “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.” The hope which he called you to is here and now, the inheritance is the past of saints gone before in your families, in your countries, and in LCC's past. The power is what you will know from your transformation as a result of this education.

I ask you to join in partnership in the hope, inheritance, and power for transformation choice and reflection with us here today. You see, we can't accomplish any of what LCC is to become and how it is to be transformed without you – without your insights, without your dedication to excellence, without your commitment of time, attention, and effort, without your becoming alumni. You thus have a duty to yourself and your family, to us, to your community of friends, to the people around you – your fellow students – and to your God! The stakes are much greater now for all of us, our children and, in fact, for all peoples as we strive to create a culture of prudence, responsibility, and integrity infused with a Christian heart that honors and respects truth, as all real truth is from God...and which encourages love and charity to all, even those we don't

think deserve it. How can anyone do this, you ask? Through your daily choices based on reflection and your education here, through your hard work and that of those around you...to be transformed and to be transformative – nothing less.

By the way, I also want to note that you in many ways are responsible for your own education. And there are others who helped found this university and who help sustain it financially and otherwise to make your education affordable. Many faculty and staff here today and for years previous have donated and sacrificed time and money to be here – their sacrifices predate and predicate your gains. Without their donations of time, talent, and money, [something they choose to do because they believe in you], you would have to pay over three times the cost of what your tuition is right now. Your education is subsidized by others, not as a matter of entitlement for you and not because you deserve it, but because they believe that the changes that are bound to occur in our world will best be led by you, as graduates from this university and as transformers for good.

It is indeed a pleasure to be here in front of you today. In many ways, I am the luckiest man in this room today. You see I managed to get here at the right time and in the right place – my staff will tell you that is the trick in helping me accomplish anything any day. You see, I've come here as the President of LCC long after a lot of the hard work has already been done – long after the sweat and blood and tears and toil of faculty, donors, founders, alums, and staff over the years have gone into developing the programs that make up this unique place. So, I get to stand up here and wax poetic for awhile, but I don't deserve it. There are many saints who have gone before, and I want to acknowledge them here now. You know it says in Ephesians 1:16 – “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” – and the longer I am in this job the more real that verse becomes to me for all the known and the unknowns, people and efforts that have occurred bringing us to this point in our history at LCC. I say “Thank you” to them for me, and on behalf of you, I say “Thank you, Ačiū.”

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" the poet, Mary Oliver, asks. Don't waste it, don't make it superficial, but make your life a cause for someone besides yourself – the Someone of eternal significance and security. Find the real you, the one with inner beauty that holds abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, by faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good and redemption, by hopefulness that stands firm even in the most discouraging of circumstances, by power and courage to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil,” to paraphrase theologian Dallas Willard.

What's at stake after today? Nothing much, just the whole world and your future...and mine. Thank God there is an LCC to uphold us, to guide us, and to make us whole. Thank you. – Kyle Usrey