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Convocation Address : By Ted Szilva
Thursday, June 3, 10:00 a.m.
Laurentian University - Fraser Auditorium

President Giroux, Members of the Senate and Board of Governors, Faculty, Staff, Graduates,
Honoured Guests.....Good Morning!

It is a great privilege for me to be here with you this morning. I am most grateful to the
Senate and Board of Governors of Laurentian University, for the honour you have
bestowed upon me.

To the Faculty and Staff, whose dedication and diligence over the past 50 years ,have been crucial to
Laurentian's ongoing development as a Centre for Learning and Innovation, I offer my sincere
congratulations. I wish you continued success.

Members of the Graduating Class of 2010, I celebrate each one of you today – and I congratulate
every person who has helped you reach this goal.

Certainly your Graduation is a significant stepping stone on your personal path – but this milestone
will also impact all those people whose lives you will touch in the future.

All of us gathered here today are acutely aware - that the world is opening its arms to receive the gift
of your unique contribution to its future.

Today, no doubt your hearts and minds are filled with expectations and unanswered questions.

As a youth, I had dreams of living an exciting and challenging life! I wanted it all!

I wasn't sure how my future would be played out– but I was going to jump in with both feet and meet
each challenge as it came along.

I was out to succeed at whatever I did!

That was many years ago – and looking back, I am amazed at how profoundly the world has changed
in my lifetime.

And today, the whole universe is feeling the adverse effects of what we humans have called
“progress”. Educated youth, like you, are now being called to use your knowledge and skill, to help
save our beautiful “planet Earth.”

In fact, caring human beings around the world are joining together in the great work of bringing
about a just and peaceful existence for all Earth's creatures. It is no small task. Each of us will have to
do our part if the mission is to be successful.

You are well prepared for the challenges that lie before you. In fact, as you continue down the
road that you have chosen, you bring with you all the good that has shaped you since you were born, -
including all the good genes and giftedness of your ancestors – and the seeds of Faith that have been
planted within you.

Graduates, I hope that today, you have at least some awareness of the amazing gift that you are to
the waiting world! May you continue to grow in that awareness – and in the
responsibility that such awareness calls forth.

As one who has lived many years – grown in self-knowledge – and discovered a path to fulfillment,
do I have any wisdom to share with you on this special day?

I would say this to you, first of all:

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Never forget who you are – and where you came from.
Be yourself! And believe that you CAN “make a difference,”
by using well, the gifts and talents the Creator has given you.

When I was in elementary school, I read a poem that first brought that idea “home” to me - and strongly influenced my young life.

It goes like this: “Oh, youth, go forth and do!
You too, to fame may rise.
You can, if you but think you can!
The great were once like you.
You envy them their proud success?
‘Twas won with gifts that you possess!”

I quoted these lines so often to our own kids, that from the time they were quite little, they could all recite them – with big voices and gales of laughter!

And Graduates, I say them now to you:

“You can, if you but think you can!
The great were once like you!
You envy them their proud success?
‘Twas won with gifts that YOU possess!”

In order to reach our full potential, each of us must dare to dream. In 1963, when I was 29 years old, I envisioned a Big Nickel Monument, standing on a hilltop in Sudbury, - drawing tourists here from all over the world!

However, when I proposed it to Sudburians as a Canadian Centennial project, there was plenty of opposition to the idea.

Some said it was an impossible dream.

Some considered it to be of no consequence to Sudbury’s future.

A few even found it scandalous that I would build what looked – to them! – like an “idol” to the god of money – towering above the earth from which most of the free world’s nickel was being mined.

Because I knew that my idea had value, I would not give up.

I decided to use my gifts of creativity, imagination, dedication and hard work, to bring it to fulfillment.

What I learned through all the ups and downs of that adventure, is this: It's not so important what other people think about our dreams.

The source of one’s empowerment is - belief in oneself – and belief in the One who plants, in us, the very seeds of our dreams.

There's a famous quote by the 19th century missionary, Stephan Grellet, which I share with you now, because it speaks to my next point:

“I expect to pass through this world, but once;
Any good thing, therefore, that I can do
Or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature,
Let me do it now,

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Let me not defer or neglect it,
For, I shall not pass this way again.”

Simply put, we get one “shot” at this life---

I’ve learned that Life has so much to teach us, and in such a short time!
The years fly by! And if we become totally caught up in our own affairs, we will miss opportunities to learn Life’s secrets - secrets which are being revealed in the ordinariness of the world around us. With the help of modern science and technology, humankind is just beginning to appreciate our unique relationship with everything in the Cosmos.

We must be attentive, because each day has its own story and its own invitation – opening us to the wonder of Life, in all its forms.

What a shame - if we humans miss the invitation – and remain mere spectators in the drama of Life.

Life is full of surprises! – It teaches, for example, how often we humans can be fooled by appearances! Who can forget the experience of Susan Boyle, the 47-year- old Scottish woman - with a voice like an angel - who competed in last year’s “Britain Has Talent”? Prejudice of all kinds is rampant in our world.

Equally painful can be Life’s ever-present reminders that “All that glitters is not gold!” The precious gift of discernment – enables us to discover Truth and goodness, where they may be found.

As we begin to open our eyes to the real beauty around us, we also begin to recognize the beauty and goodness within ourselves. Community is born out of such awareness, and with it, the gift of Compassion - for ourselves and others.

Such gifts can only flourish, if we constantly guard against the compulsiveness which can easily drive our overly-busy lives, robbing us of time to listen, to wonder, to marvel at Nature!.....
to enjoy being alive!

Thus awakened – and with our eyes wide open, we are free to discover opportunities for helping others enjoy life - especially those who are disadvantaged in some way.

The Blue Door Soup Kitchen holds, for me, such opportunities... It is a place to reach out to the many men and women among us, who need to be recognized and appreciated as our brothers and sisters, while they are suffering misfortune and hardship. It is my privilege to serve them - and advocate for them.

The International L’Arche Community, founded by Jean Vanier, has been close to my heart since the first L’Arche Home opened in Sudbury in 1982.

Presently, there are three L’Arche Homes and a Vocational Program in Sudbury. As they journey through life together, Community members share the gift of belonging - and witness to the healing power of love. The presence of L’Arche is a blessing in our city – and my association with the L’Arche Community has been a blessing in my life.

I also am privileged to serve as Chaplain and Padre to the Professional Fire Fighters in the City of Greater Sudbury Fire Services. As a former Firefighter myself, I am happy to provide any supportive

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service I can, to these men and women who, each day, put their own lives in danger, in order to protect the lives of Sudburians.

My recent appointment as Padre of the War Pensioners of Canada, Fred Vincent Branch, Sudbury, provides me an opportunity to be of service to these patriotic men and women and their families. To serve others, out to our own giftedness, is a rewarding experience, but more than that - it is a duty - our duty to the human family. What you and I don't do - no one else can do, in quite the same way. No gift is too small; no service without value.

The creation of the Big Nickel and the Big Nickel Mine is a success story.

This community has benefitted from the economic growth the project generated - and from its impact on Sudbury's profile, internationally.

Of significance to students, was the partnership created with Cambrian College. It provided the first Canadian hands-on mining and tunneling experience for Mining Technology students.

The dream continues to unfold – but now, in the hands of those to whom it has been entrusted. The Big Nickel and Dynamic Earth continue to celebrate Sudbury's unique heritage.

I have heard it said that, when our life on Earth comes to an end, we will have to answer three questions about our life journey.

It won't matter then how much money we made, or how “successful” we were, in the eyes of the world.

What will matter is this:

Did you love someone?

- Did you allow someone to love you?

Have you made a difference?

It is to responding YES to those three questions that I will continue to devote my energy, time and talents, throughout my remaining years.

Just before my concluding remarks and on a more personal note, I would like to thank my family, and in particular my children and grandchildren for their continuing support and love throughout the years, in all our endeavors.

To my best friend, my sweetheart and my bride of over 50 years, words cannot express the love and gratitude which are in my heart. You have received this Honorary Doctorate with me at my side today. I thank my God, and you Betty, for your presence in my life.

As I continue to age, I grow more acutely aware that my days are limited – and that there is still so much that must be done, if we humans, and the beautiful planet on which we live, are to survive and thrive.

I ask you, therefore, members of the Graduating Class of 2010, to join me in responding to the call - to be agents of change and ambassadors for justice.....one day at a time.

As you go, the signs along your road may read something like this:

Let us not take anything in life for granted.

Let us make the most of every day!

Let us cultivate a grateful heart and a hope-filled spirit.

Give thanks for your family, your good friends, your teachers, your Pastors – everyone who has helped you grow, and learn, and blossom – into the beautiful young adult you have become.

Those of us who have walked the Road of Life before you -are so proud of you!

Now, to you we throw the torch!

Go forth with our blessing, and our best wishes.

Good Luck to each of you! Thank you. Merci. Migwetch.