



Occasional Address given by Sister Clare Condon SGS

Australian Catholic University Graduation Ceremony

26 May 2022, Sydney

Greetings to Chancellor, the Honourable Martin Daubney AM QC, Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Zlatko Skrbis, Bro Julian McDonald CFC AO – former Chancellor, Sister Patty Fawcner – Congregational Leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Members of Senate and the Company, academic staff, graduands and your proud families, my family and community, Sisters of the Good Samaritan and all guests.

I, too, acknowledge the First Nations People, the custodians of this land on which we now gather. I pay my respects to the elders, past, present and emerging, and I recognise your care of land and waters over thousands of years. I acknowledge all Indigenous peoples who are present here today.

Congratulations to all those graduating today, in secondary education and early childhood education, the visual arts and humanities, Bachelor of Arts graduands and Educational Leadership. What a moment of recognition and achievement for each one of you and for all those who have supported your education to this point, particularly your families, your past teachers and mentors, and the academic staff of this university!

You come here today, having studied in the peculiar and challenging circumstances of a pandemic. Remote learning, perhaps in isolation has brought out qualities that you did not previously identify in yourself; such qualities as resilience, self-reliance, confidence and even stick-at-it-ness. You may have discovered an appreciation of quiet, reflective thinking, cogitating on the important things of life, because you have been away from the rush, even the clamour and distractions of ordinary university life.

My own university life commenced in a similar vein, not because of a pandemic, but because as members of a religious community, we were directed to correspondence study while we taught in schools during the day. As a correspondence student I achieved my first degree at the University of New England in the 1970s. And my professional life as a teacher commenced in primary school. Indeed, a long time ago. So you might rightly ask: what has an elderly nun got to offer university graduands in 2022?

I joined the Sisters of the Good Samaritan because I wanted to seek God. If I am truly honest, I wanted to get the idea of a religious vocation out of my system. Little did I know then what opportunities and gifted challenges lay before me and that seeking God was a much broader and exciting adventure than I could have imagined.

Over my life as a Good Sam I have learnt the value and giftedness of working with like-minded people, of listening to Australia's First Nations women, of living in community with young Vietnamese women asylum seekers, of befriending the people of Kiribati and The Philippines and appreciating the beauty of Japanese culture. I experienced the richness of belonging to a worldwide movement of women who follow the Rule of Benedict. All of these diverse experiences have brought me to reflect upon this strange mystery of God.

Life's experiences opened new doors and enriching encounters, which taught me the values of the dignity of the created order and our humanity, the importance of being one with others and not being an isolate, one who is only focussed on oneself and consumerism.

Your education, which brings you to this graduation, will open new doors for you, new classrooms and teaching spaces, possibilities to be a leader of learning and achievement as well as an appreciation of the artistic potential perhaps to the most vulnerable. We now know the importance of early childhood education for the future development of students. Your qualifications can be an avenue for enrichment to all those whom you meet, giving confidence and hope in a divided and troubled world.

I say to you today. Don't be fixated on ordering and arranging your life as if it only belongs to you. That is a challenge in our very individualistic and even narcissistic society. Be adventurous and let life lead you at times to places, cultures and experiences you might not necessarily plan or choose for yourself. While you are still young, be outgoing and serve, teach and engage in those places that might have the greatest need. The rewards will be way beyond your expectations. Bring your learnings and your inquisitiveness to the most vulnerable and learn from them, so as to be a source of mutual goodness. Bring the message of a mysterious God, with all its potential, to those afraid of life and who struggle with its limitations.

Your achievements today, as enriching as they are to you, do not belong to you alone.

As you celebrate, take time to acknowledge the gift of this educational experience. You have received it from others, from parents, siblings, teachers, tutors, children, confreres, artists, writers, coaches, friends and many more. Remember that you never stand alone. You belong to a greater community, yes even a world of mystery, which you cannot explain, but want to understand. There will be times when grief, sadness or mis-steps will enter your life. Take heart and believe that you are supported and strengthened by reaching out to all those around you.

Your education does not stop today. It is beginning afresh. Take the opportunities that will arise to be creative, to take new paths of learning, to expand your repertoire, be imaginative and inquiring. Trust that if you are open, the mystery of life can meet your wildest dreams.

Step out today from this university with the confidence, resilience and ingenuity to create a world which respects the other, learns from the new and ever changing, seeks the good and rejoices in the achievements of united communities.

I dedicate this award today to all the women religious who have served the Australian community since the arrival of the Sisters of Charity in 1838. It is they who created Catholic healthcare, social service, education, and a spirituality of justice within our church. So this award belongs to all of them.

As a Sister of the Good Samaritan my life has been shaped by the Story of the Good Samaritan, let me finish with an adaptation of that story from a Good Samaritan Education staff member, Gabrielle Sinclair.

Jesus. A Lawyer. A question.

An answer.

Do this and you will live.

A deeper question. Who is my neighbour?

A story.

Violated and left half dead.

One, two, maybe more pass by on the other side.

Blind, important, privileged they pass by.

An open heart approaches.

Seeing humanity. Neighbour. Responds.

Oil, wine and love poured out.

Immediate safety assured; hope restored.

Jesus. A lawyer. A question.

An answer.

Mercy.

Go and do likewise.

Each and every one of us can go and do likewise.

Sister Clare Condon SGS

BA, Grad Dip in Educational Leadership, MPS.

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