

Fairfield University undergraduate valedictory address

May 23, 2010

Delivered by Christopher Staysniak, of Ridgefield, Connecticut, who earned a bachelor of arts degree in history from the College of Arts & Sciences.

Humbled and honored, I welcome you as we gather here on Bellarmine lawn for this most momentous occasion. Today we pause to celebrate and to give thanks for the rich education of mind, body, and soul we, the class of 2010, have been privileged to receive here at Fairfield University, and the community, better yet the family that it has provided us in this four year process of vocational discovery.

To start, I would like to thank the parents, family, friends, faculty, staff, and benefactors who have made this moment possible. Every senior seated before you now is a living testament to your time, your efforts, your patience, and, most importantly, your love. Today's commencement ceremonies are as much a celebration of you as it is of those here dressed in cap and gown. Thank you for making this moment possible, your efforts have made all the difference.

To my brothers and sisters of the Class of 2010 thank you for being so giving of yourselves in the time we have shared here. I am inspired by each and every single one of you, and together you have become to me a second, really, really big family. You have made Fairfield my home for the past four years, and I will sorely miss interacting with you and growing with you each and every day.

But, as we stand here in the twilight of our collegiate careers, I would like to recall the very beginning of the journey that brought us here, our freshman move-in day. As you may remember, the day was dominated by an ill-timed power outage that dimmed the confines of Dolan, Campion, Regis, and Gonzaga Halls. At the time, the dearth of lighting only exacerbated the stresses of hauling mattress toppers, constructing futons, and realizing just how snug a fit forced triple was going to be. But looking back, I feel that the darkness of that ordeal symbolized the fact that we, too, were in many ways in the dark. For, unbeknownst to us at the time, the enlightenment of our Fairfield experiences, and the totality of our Jesuit education, awaited us in so many, many ways.

Since the figurative and physical darkness of that day, I believe that we have all been touched, challenged, and dare I say transformed by the eight semesters that have elapsed since. I have witnessed first hand the way in which instances inside and outside the classroom have provided the sort of education that illuminates the mind and lights a fire deep with the soul. Between the ardors of our core education, service in Bridgeport or Belize, the civic duties of FUSA, and those reinvigorating life chats with friends over greasy fries in the Stag, we have at Fairfield been provided with the space to learn, the space to discover, and the space to sparkle and shine.

For here at Fairfield we have been blessed with a uniquely Jesuit education. Thanks to guiding principles like *cura personalis*, and the *magis*, we have become the beneficiaries of an education that has helped us discover our passions, maximize our talents and abilities, and at this juncture challenges us to take all we have learned and all we have become so that we may go out from this place and not just find out place in the world, but in the words of St. Ignatius, go set the world aflame. The Fairfield experience is one that has encourages us not just to find a career, but to discern what our vocation in life may be, defined in the inscription that sits Loyola Hall as that place "where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

My own, often circuitous path that I have embarked on here, I feel, has mirrored these aims, as I have made my way to discover that which lights my fires so I may one day kindle others. I began freshman year as a biology major with hopes of one day becoming a medical doctor. But in the classroom, as I broke countless test tubes in the lab and elsewhere tackled theories of utopian politics and the mechanisms of ordinary differential equations, I instead found a love of history and a new life goal of pursuing a less lucrative doctorate of sorts than the one I initially had in mind. Outside the classroom my has brought me New Orleans to rebuild houses in the wake of Katrina, to sleeping in a box in the traffic circle to raise awareness about homelessness, and to the lectern of the chapel to share my faith with friends and strangers alike. I have held hands with the homeless in

Atlanta, lived a stone's throw from Capitol Hill, interviewed immigrants from Stalinist Russia, and learned that eight cups of coffee in one day, regardless of the to-do list that awaits, is far too much coffee, indeed.

My Fairfield career, though rich, is by no means an atypical anomaly. I am no outlier, and I am no different amongst the ranks of classmates. Well, save for the fact that I have a twin brother in the crowd. And, no, if one of us stubs our toe the other does not feel it.

My classmates and peers, among you I am a drop in the ocean. For I know, I have seen the fruits of your lives here at Fairfield. Your own paths to this moment from our initial darkness to this dawn have been every bit as stimulating, as exciting, as formative, as impacting as mine, and probably much, much more.

Class of 2010, I think it is proper that we give thanks and take joy in all we have achieved and all we have experienced in years past, but let us not rest on the laurels of this moment. We did not fuel and grow the fires that have been sparked within us only to reduce them to embers now that we have reached this point. I believe that we must continue the journeys we have begun here, and furthermore keep in mind that by our Jesuit educations we are now called to be agents of positive change wherever we will go. It is time to harness the great talents and energies that I have seen in each and every one of you, and illuminate the places our choices, our circumstances, and our lives will lead us. Shaped and formed as women and men for others, our diplomas are now an I.O.U for the world around us to cash in upon when the proper time comes. It is the truth that we have entered the ranks of a privileged few, in that we truly have the abilities to both follow our passions and in doing so have a great impact on the world at large which in so many ways needs so much.

I know the idealistic charges I levy today may not be that you may wish to hear, given the practical obstacles that await life after college like getting a job, finding a place to live, and tackling those student loans, But do not worry, for thanks to the gifts of our Jesuit education, you have already become the movers and shakers of tomorrow. While procrastinating in the lower level of the BCC, pulling all nighters on volatile mixtures of energy drinks, and soaking in the myriads of prospect that have been afforded us here, we have all grown up, and have all in our own way, and resulting from the paths we have taken, become a candle unto the darkness, and a shining light for others to see.

Our future is not a question of bearing a cross of privilege, or shouldering our responsibilities like a burdensome yoke. I have learned with you, I have lived with you, I have served with you, I have broken bread with you, and I have grown with you. Truth be told, you are already leaders, reformers, game-changers, community builders, and possessors of great abilities, great talents, and great strength that still remains to be explored and untapped. We have nothing to fear as inheritors of this Jesuit tradition of being women and men for others. By the nature of the experiences we have had in this institution, we stand here as well equipped as any to take on the world before us. The metamorphosis has already taken place. At this juncture it is only a matter of spreading ones wings and seeing how high the winds of the future will take us.

Fairfield University Class of 2010, together we have journeyed from the darkness of freshman year, and together we now draw the final curtain on our Fairfield careers. Today is a time to celebrate the close of this chapter in our lives. Tomorrow is the time to continue to shine.

As my time with you draws to an end, I would like to leave you with the prayer that sits aside my bed, and that I have read every day since we first moved in almost four years ago. Written by Pedro Arrupe, the former head of the Society of Jesus, it is a call to continue that principled search for who where are, what we are passionate about, and what we love. Class of 2010, I have loved every minute, every moment of the journey I have shared here with you, and I hope that you will continue to engage with that which emblazons your soul, so you may go out and set this world aflame.

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is,
Than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
What seizes your imagination,
Will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
What you will do with your weekends,
Who you know,
What you read,
What breaks your heart,
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.