

Baccalaureate address given by Barbara Lum SSJ, 5/9/2015

Welcome! Congratulations to the graduates, their professors, their families and all their supporters! This is a beautiful celebration of the work you have completed here at Nazareth.

When I graduated from Nazareth College nursing program in 1958, I never imagined that a few years later I would be part of a history-making event. To you who are graduating I say “You never know!”

The Hebrew scripture prophet Isaiah speaks about his transition into his life calling “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” “And I said, ‘Here I am! Send me!’ ”

The sisters of St. Joseph sent me, a year after I graduated, to Selma, Alabama. I knew Alabama was located in the Deep South and that our sisters’ mission was a hospital and a grade school for black people. I had little idea of water fountains and rest rooms labeled Colored and White, or of segregated neighborhoods, restaurants, sidewalks, hospitals, and lives, of the poverty and exclusion from opportunity of most people of color.

In Selma, I began to get used to the melodious Southern dialect and expressions such as the new assistant administrator telling me that as part of his orientation “Sister Michael Anne (the Administrator) carried me around the hospital so I’d see where everything was.” I had a fanciful image of him perched on her forearm as they walked around Good Samaritan hospital.

I did not get used to the disrespect that I sometimes saw or heard about from the experiences of our black practical nursing students and nurses, or stories from



Barbara Lum SSJ, speaking at Baccalaureate. / Photo by Alex Shukoff

patients, or the actual injuries some black patients had suffered at the hands of white racist bullies.



Barbara Lum SSJ at a capping ceremony in Selma in the 1960s in Selma, Alabama.

When the lunch counter sit-ins were happening in North Carolina and Nashville, one of the nurses told me “That will never come to Selma”.

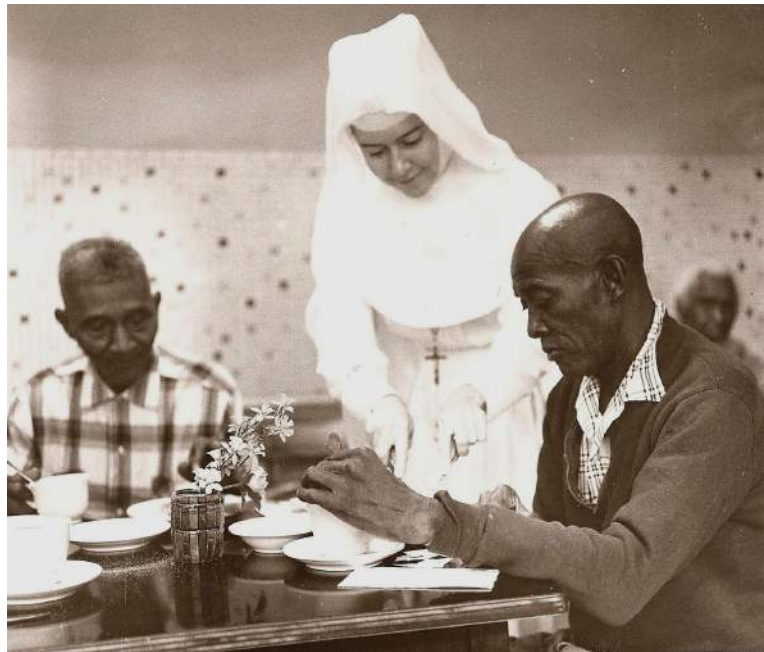
John Lewis, a young leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was beaten while sitting at a “Whites only” lunch counter in Nashville. Some 40 years later, the white man who beat him came to his congressional office to ask his forgiveness. They talked for 2 hours. Congressman Lewis believes that if he as a young college student had brought charges against that man, rather than forgiving him on the spot, the man would always have believed that he, not John Lewis was the victim.

I registered to vote in Selma when the voter registration movement was well underway as was the resistance of the White Citizens’ Council whose banner was “White Supremacy”. We paid the poll tax and stood in line with more than 100 people, mostly Black, for 6 hours, while the registrars took coffee breaks, lunch breaks, offered coffee breaks to office people down the hall, and generally kept the line of mostly Black people from progressing very far.

A memorable Selma event during this time was that the children, mostly high school students began to march to the courthouse for voting rights for Black people. Even though they would not be old enough to vote, they saw their actions as essential to their future, since their parents would face possible job loss, harassment, even loss of their homes. The Sheriff sent his posse on horseback to chase the children out into the countryside for about 4 miles, hitting them with electric cattle prods to keep them moving.

Their courage led their teachers to hold a “Teachers’ March” risking their jobs and safety because they could no longer remain silent.

Many of you know that this year, Selma, Alabama celebrated 50 years since the nonviolent voter registration march led by now Congressman John Lewis and Hosea Williams. The March was stopped just on the other side of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. In 1965, our sisters and Good Samaritan Hospital staff cared for nearly 100 marchers hit by billy clubs wielded by hastily deputized sheriffs and tear gas tossed by Alabama state troopers. They were pursued and run down by the horseback posse, riders also hastily deputized by a violent segregationist sheriff.



Barbara Lum SSJ at a nursing home in Selma, Alabama, in the 1960s.

As you also may remember, that year President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965, with the words of the Civil Rights Freedom Anthem “We Shall Overcome.”

You, as graduates, are probably much more aware today than I was at graduation, of the challenges to justice in the world you are entering as graduates. Job, career, life calling are probably very much on your mind as you prepare to leave Nazareth College.

- A question for you at this time is how can I serve? What does the world need from me, from my gifts and talents and my heart’s desire?
- Who else feels as I do? What are they doing about it?

- We together can do much more than I alone.
- The Sisters of St. Joseph who founded Nazareth College in 1924 didn't do it alone. They were together in their desire to provide college education for women and the entire community of the Sisters of St. Joseph supported their desire and their efforts.

Nazareth College has a long history of service, of inclusion and outreach, beginning with the founding Sisters of St. Joseph. Today, the Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue with Dr. Shafiq, the Religious Studies Department led by Dr. Susan Nowak of the Sisters of St. Joseph with its emphasis on learning the lessons of the Holocaust, and much more that is Nazareth all give testimony to making connections that matter.

Some are familiar with St. Joseph's Catholic Worker House and their Saturday meal under Dr. Harry Murray's leadership. Others of you have tutored in schools.

We live in a time in world history when divisions among neighbors, religions, tribes and nations call for peace makers, for community.

Nazareth's Interfaith Studies Department, the LGBTQ Alliance, the educational and health studies and their outreach in the city of Rochester and globally, all speak to people's deepest desire to make a difference where they are, wherever that may be, and with like-minded people who desire that their lives matter.

Some of you I have met and been very impressed with your commitment to helping people who are less blessed with material success than many of you may hope to be, and with your outreach to places all over the globe.

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- Author Dean Brackley points out that "Martin Luther King discovered his prophetic calling during the Montgomery bus boycott. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany and Dorothy Day in Depression-era New York grew into their vocations in response to their turbulent surroundings.

- Brackley notes “our surroundings shake us, sift us, and draw our vocations from us.” Each of these people had countless people behind them and with them in the work they accomplished.
- Don Pedro Arupe, Society of Jesus prayed, “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 evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude...”
- A sister visiting at our convent this week from Chicago told me she lives with an interfaith staff in a house with people from other countries. The house residents are immigrants who are under documented. The house is an alternative to detention. It was started when groups from several different faith traditions realized they were all working on the detention issue and banded together on this project.

Here in Rochester, many refugees have arrived through Catholic Family Service. Some of you have worked at Mary’s Place with refugees who are coming, many from refugee camps, into Rochester from places torn by war and religious or ethnic persecution. The community of volunteers makes their lives safer and provides a place where children can play and learn.



The vision of the first Sisters of St Joseph in 1650’s France was union with God and with the dear neighbor. It is still a good vision for anyone searching for a meaningful life, a life that matters, as we look for community and service in various ways.

“Then we heard the voice of the Lord saying “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

- “And we said, “Here we are! Send Us!”