

# Community of Congregations Annual Meeting

January 18, 2007, River Forest United Church

Dr. Donna Carroll, President of Dominican University keynote speaker

Good evening. Thank you for inviting me to join you tonight --- and more important for recognizing the voice, and hopefully the contributions, of Dominican University in shaping future generations of socially responsible and actively engaged citizens. Tonight is intended to be a conversation, not a formal speech, so please let us know what you are thinking. The title of the conversation is *Sowing the Seeds of a Meaningful Life*.

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In a recent Pew Research survey asking more than 500 18-25 year olds to choose their generation's top goals from among five options, they listed:

- As most important: To get rich (81%)
- Second most important: To be famous (51%)
- A distant third: to help people who need help (30%)
- Fourth: to be leaders in their community (22%)
- And finally: To be more spiritual (10%)

In contrast, in a series of focus groups completed in 2006 by Hanson Dodge to determine the perceived benefits of a Dominican University education, students, again 18-25 years old, most often listed:

- Belonging to something that matters
- Developing self-respect and respect for others
- Personal and professional growth
- Recognizing my ability to make a difference, and
- Having a more satisfying life

According to the national Survey on Student Engagement, between freshman and senior year, Dominican University students experience significant growth, above the norm, in the category labeled *Active and Collaborative Learning*.

Last year, Dominican University students logged thousands of hours of service --- volunteering, student teaching, completing service learning projects, participating in alternative spring breaks, and the like. All of which makes me very proud!

In the spirit of full disclosure, however, let me also mention that a survey by the Dominican Office of Service Learning identified several obstacles to student engagement in service activities --- most notably a lack of time and money. The latter refers to the fact that most Dominican students work to support their education, and so, cannot afford the time to volunteer.

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Dominican University's mission is to prepare students to pursue truth, to give compassionate service and to participate in the creation of a more just and humane world.

*In practical translation, that means that*

We seek and promise, to the best of our ability, to inspire in our students --- through a rigorous undergraduate liberal arts curriculum, through service-oriented professional programs, and through activities that encourage reflection leading to social action --- the capacity to lead more meaningful lives.

You might ask --- What is the definition of *a meaningful life*?

or

How actively does Dominican University fortify its graduates to lead meaningful lives?

These are not simple, or easily measured, questions.

As we of many years know, meaning is an outcome that accompanies life experience --- similar to the hindsight appreciation of a liberal arts education or, as in my own experience, the recognition

of the impact of attending a women's college on confidence and aspirations, not easily understood at age 17, when boys trump at educational opportunities. You do not teach meaning, rather it grows as values shape life choices.

Just recently, Dominican University conducted a series of interviews with alumnae/i to attempt to better understand the enduring impact of its mission on alumnae/i's life choices.

Let me tell you four stories that help define a meaningful life --- Dominican style.

1. **Maria Kuhn**, Class of 1973, was raised in a poor German speaking enclave in Milwaukee. By the time she was a teenager, she had dropped out of school and was living on the streets --- still unable to read or write English. A Rosary College alum adopted Maria and sent her to her alma mater --- to the sisters. Today Maria is a mental health therapist and nationally-recognized advocate for an integrated model of health care. She says, *The steadiness of the environment, the intellectual curiosity, the sense of community --- they were transformative.*

2. **Michelle Rockwood** graduated from Dominican with a journalism major in 2004 and left immediately for the Peace Corps in Mali. She says in her blog, *This country and its people have evoked emotions --- anger, fear, joy --- to a degree I never knew the human body was capable of.* When she battles moments of despair she turns to her Dominican mantra --- Caritas et Veritas --- truth and compassion. *I am not sure what the truth is, she says, however, I do know that somewhere in my four years at Dominican I learned what it means to live and serve others compassionately.*

3. **Caroline Crozier**, Class of 1979, was a successful IT entrepreneur, until she started volunteer tutoring in Chicago's Hispanic Pilsen neighborhood. Caroline saw such great need, and such potential, that she began consulting for the Chicago Public Schools and eventually reengineering her business to train teachers

to use emerging technologies. She downplays her generosity and service saying, *I simply have a passion for making a difference.*

And finally,

4. **Angel Rivera**, Class of 2002 and 2004, a lung transplant procurement coordinator, describes his Dominican experience as follows --- *You come in thinking about all the money you'll make, and you come out thinking about all the good you'll do in the world.*

In collective hindsight then, there are several conditions that we at Dominican believe encourage a more meaningful life.

1. First and foremost, a sense of belonging --- to a family, to a community, local and global, and to the earth.
2. A respect for the dignity of each person resulting in a commitment to social justice.
3. The curiosity of a life long learner.
4. The recognition that with the privilege of education comes the responsibility to give back, and finally,
5. A palpable desire to do good.

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How does this all relate to hope in the next and future generations of engaged citizens?

Dominican is part of a national movement, what we call a *campus compact*, to advance the public purpose of college and universities by educating students for civic and social responsibility. One important way that we do that is through our service learning curriculum. I would like to ask Erika Corona, one of the student leaders in our Office of Service Learning to talk about the purpose of service learning and students' experiences. Erika.

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Let me end with a boast, a few worries and an invitation:

- Dominican University, in collaboration with San Miguel Schools, received third place honors for this year's Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Partnership Award for Campus-Community Collaboration.
- Worries:
  - increasing unchurched/diminishment of organized religion

- individual vs. community (technology, mobility)
  - racism/classism (after 9/11)
  - Invitation – Dominican University's Siena Center will present Fr. William Leahy, president of Boston College, on January 25 in a lecture titled, "The Church in the United States Five Years Later: Reasons for Hope."
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