

Commissioning 2013

- June 15, 2013

- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

This is the very first event of the Commencement Weekend of Seattle University. It is like our wake-up call, our reveille, for the weekend of Brunch, Mass, and Commencement. I always feel it is right to start here at the deepest, the most meaningful, and the most moving ceremony of the weekend in the commissioning of our students as new officers in the U.S. Army. The oath, the pinning of the bars by parents or family members, and receiving the first salute are all forceful, strong, impressive actions which will always be remembered.

What stands out for me in the midst of the courage and commitment, the brave promise and love of country, the comradeship and pride is something that lies beneath them. That something is trust. At a moment like this of pledging fidelity, you simply cannot know what that fidelity will require, where it will take you, what it calls forth from you. This ceremony always recalls for me my own vows as a Jesuit of poverty, chastity, and obedience I made 50 years ago this coming September 8th. I could not possibly have known what living those vows would actually mean. Neither can you know what the consequence of your solemn oath today will entail. That doesn't mean you shouldn't take that oath; that doesn't mean you are naïve. No, it means that you know today what you are doing, you are serious and sincere about it, as you become an officer in the Army with your eyes wide open. And you trust. Oh, you are prepared as best as you can be, but still you must trust. Everything of the last several years has enabled you to say, "Yes" and to trust.

There is a book which came out this past year called, The Defining Decade. It makes a solid case for the fact that for young adults today the defining period in their lives is no longer, as it once was, high school and college, but now has shifted to the decade, the ten years, after college; roughly from age 22 to 32. (There was a time when I could make vows for life at age 18. That is no longer the case.) Sure, you have built solid foundations for the future, for what kind of person you will be, but the complexity of society, the endless number of choices and options, the multiple sets of persons for friendship or relationship, the very unsettledness of our country, our culture, our economy, our world, all shift the decade of defining who you will really be forward to the ten years ahead of you. You are commencing the Defining Decade; you are being commissioned into the years when what kind of officer, comrade, and person you will become will be defined by your choices.

This is where trust particularly comes in: to enter into something knowing that it will define you in ways no one can foresee and that you will come out the other end the real you you will have chosen to be. Trust does not mean feeling confident; it may mean feeling unsure but going forward anyhow. Trust requires being vulnerable to the future, allowing what you don't currently know to shape you. Trust is deeper and more personal and more daily than courage, but is its twin.

As you move forward from this day as commissioned officers you must trust several persons. You must trust the Army and its leadership for it is making a commitment to you today as well as you making a commitment to the Army. You must trust your fellow soldiers, the men and women of any unit you lead; they have an obligation toward you as an officer but you must gain their trust. You must trust your God who is the deepest source of your life, well-being, and ultimate security. And finally you must trust yourself, drawing on the deepest, truest, and most personal sources of life and strength within you.

Know as you go forward that the rest of us also have to live our lives with the same kind of trust you are called to have. Certainly I do as a priest, a Jesuit, and a president. Certainly your parents do in their commitments and in all the trust they have shown in helping you get to this day. Trust is of the very stuff of any committed life. Our thanks to you for accepting an extraordinary commitment of service today and please know our respect and our prayers for you.