

Graduate Commencement 2016

- June 12, 2016
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Welcome to the Graduate Commencement of Seattle University. Congratulations to you and your family members and friends. I hope you've had a great weekend. I come to this ceremony as the last of eight events all with speeches for me to give over the course of the 48 hours of this weekend. We save the best to last. I feel with our graduate school students on this occasion we can have a bit more of an adult conversation. We can engage one another as colleagues, as fellow professionals, as persons of deeper and truer and better-educated commitments.

Every person who has visited Seattle University to evaluate its programs, apply for positions here, survey our students or our climate remarks that that they know of no other university which is so clearly mission-focused, knows its mission so well, promulgates it, seeks to fulfill it. Our mission is composed of three parts. "Seattle University is dedicated to the education of the whole person, to professional formation, and to empowering leaders for a just and humane world." I often feel that the middle part of that commitment "professional formation", is under-recognized or under-rated. Yet, it is more than anything else what your graduate degrees aim to achieve: "professional formation", and it this "professional formation" which most clearly "empowers leaders for a just and humane world".

Your graduate degrees give you access to the professions whether in business, education, criminal justice, nursing, as psychologists and spiritual leaders, in fine arts leadership, sports administration, public administration, finance and accounting, non-profit or executive leadership. A profession is defined in Webster's as "a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation". I am quite sure you accept the bit about "long and intensive". You didn't get here in a day, or easily. More than 80% of those who start college intend to get a master's degree; less than half of that number do. Your profession, its complexity and credibility with those whom you serve requires the "long and intensive academic preparation" to which you have dedicated yourselves. Professions are the true levers of our society for good, for justice, for humane life, for social and political and economic thriving, even for peace and for religious and spiritual meaning. If Seattle University's mission is to make a difference in the world, you are the leaders and levers of that difference.

Note, however, that a profession is not defined simply as a job or a career but as a "calling" requiring long, intensive, and specialized preparation. Because it is a "calling", our mission does not say we are dedicated to "professional education", but rather to "professional formation". Formation is much more than education. It is about the shaping of values, development of habits, discovering one's largest commitments, adopting deep sympathies, being changed by engagement with others, ultimately about orienting oneself toward a life-mission and passion. A profession, because it is a calling, requires a long and intensive formation. Your graduation today celebrates how you have formed yourselves and who you have become in response to your calling to your chosen profession or service. Congratulations and thanks.

I am very pleased that at your graduation the honorary degree recipient and our commencement speaker is, in my view, the foremost leader of the profession of Jesuit higher education not only in the United State but in the world. Let me present my friend and colleague D. John J. DeGioia, president of Georgetown University.