

Mission Day: The Year the World Came to Seattle University

Mission Day

November 19, 2008

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Nine weeks ago today and at exactly this hour the faculty and staff of Seattle University gathered in the big tent in what is known as the “University Convocation” to kick off the new school year and to look at what it might offer to us. It is great to be gathered again and this time with many of our students.

Nine weeks ago I said, “this is the year the world comes to Seattle U.” Hot on the heels of the spectacular new-world-revealing Olympic Games in China we headed into a year that promised to be the experientially-groundlaying year for the way in which our education and our way of being with one another is increasingly a global education and a global experience even on our own campus and in our partnerships within our surrounding neighborhoods.

Little did we know at the time how much the economically clouded times nine weeks ago would develop into a national and worldwide thunderstorm that would affect all of us, our families, our jobs, our cities, our nation, all countries of the world, especially people who are already poor, along with our

own university. Indeed the world came to Seattle U in an unexpected way, and it will be with us in this way in this worldwide economic instability and depression for a very long time. While its effects on us are already real and unavoidable, we must as a university dedicated to “empowering leaders for a just and humane world” particularly ask ourselves how is this storm affecting the poorest of the earth and how is what we are experiencing but a brush of what they experience fully and pervadingly all the time. What does “a well-educated solidarity”—which is what the Jesuit goal of a global education is all about—call us to learn, to feel, to gain the competencies to respond to, and to pray for?

Even more dramatically and unforgettably the world came home to Seattle U in this fall quarter in the election of Barack Obama as our next president and the outpouring of celebration and hope of the entire world for what he and through him our country can be in a new way for a world seeking a new future. The world welcomes and awaits a new America with a new leader. When the local paper headlined the fact that 54 of you gave \$200 or more to his campaign and none of you gave that much to the other campaign, we got some calls, some complaints, some questioning about who we are as a university. We are, indeed, a university for all, and we need all, and we need freedom of space for articulation of all political and moral views. Yet, it is clear that your hopes were up for what this election might mean for the values we hold as a university of “empowering leaders for a just and humane world.” How does this election, this worldwide welcome and hope, call us to be part of a new America by being a new university more committed to justice and

humanity in the world? How can it inspire our global education with new goals, new insights, new energy, new commitment?

Today is a most providential, gifted, one-in-a-university's lifetime way the world comes to Seattle U in a visual, a personal, an inspirational, and an educational way in a special Mission Day with the three winners of the Opus Prizes, people from Nicaragua, India and Burundi. I doubt there will for a long time be another Mission Day quite like this one which has been made possible by the Opus Prize Foundation's choice of us to be the university partner in the finding, nominating, visiting, bringing to Seattle, and awarding of these three faith-based humanitarians who through social entrepreneurship are a blessing to their people. Thank you, Opus Prize Foundation for choosing us. Today by being with us, the prize winners are a blessing to us, and today after all the celebrations and the spectacular Awards Ceremony at Benaroya Hall last evening, we are here for three precious hours to learn from them and to dialogue with them.

The question for us today is how do they, their work, and their people help to animate our mission and illuminate it from within. We now know very well that our students and ourselves do not learn by concept alone but more fully by contact which lights up our concepts, stretches them, forces us to take our concepts further in ways we could not have imagined without the contact. We are forming ourselves and our students into a well-educated solidarity with the people of the world as they are by the fruitful and powerful interplay of contact and concept.

Today's Mission Day is more about that contact with Michael Woodard, with Krishnammal Jagannathan, with Marguerite Barankitse. Thanks for being with us and sharing yourselves and your people with us today. It is also about contact with our students and our faculty who went across the world to meet the three Opus Prize Winners last spring. What happens when four groups of people come together?

- **these three faith-based humanitarians and social entrepreneurs**
- **their people who are with us visually and movingly**
- **our faculty and student ambassadors**
- **and we the faculty, staff, and students of Seattle U**

...all come together for a morning, a morning in a university with a mission?

Let us just let the great gift of this Mission Day happen and find what it does for us as part of this special year when the world came to Seattle University.

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