

## Academic Day Convocation 2019

- September 23, 2019
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Good morning and welcome to new first year and transfer students to your academic convocation. It was a rather different and dramatic moment here in the Redhawk Center when I spoke to you on Saturday afternoon when many of your families were with you. Today your faculty, your professors, your academic advisers are with you to welcome you into Seattle University and into this level and kind of education you are now engaging in.

I am sure that many of you have had very good teachers before, but professors are more than good teachers, though they are also that. They have taken their area of intellectual interest just as far as it can go, and further than any other single person has taken their specific intellectual focus. It is a privilege to study with professors, to be informed and guided, critiqued and encouraged, in your own intellectual pursuits and your application of them to the issues and opportunities of your world. Today, students and professors meet in this academic convocation, but students and professors will really meet one another in the classroom, in the lab, in the professor's office, in group and individual guidance, and in research. Welcome.

Welcome to Jesuit university education. As you enter a Jesuit university you enter and become part of a worldwide and varied network of Jesuit initiatives, not only hundreds of Jesuit university and colleges, but many times more high schools, trade schools, parishes, spirituality centers, refugee and migration camps and initiatives, astronomical observatories, social justice institutes, indigenous peoples works, environmental agencies, international policy foundations, humble work with the poor in cooperatives, and much more, all united by a common purpose or mission. No other educational network which a student enters can begin to match what you enter by being part of a Jesuit university and its wide family of engagement, service, knowledge, faith, diversity, and justice. Welcome to Jesuit higher education and its Jesuit family.

It has recently been “discerned”—you will hear that word often here as; it is something much deeper and more personal than thinking and deciding—discerned that there are four threads which need to be interwoven in the fabric of anything that calls itself “Jesuit”. I want to mention two of them. The first I highlight is the commitment “to accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future”. This means that you, the student, are the ones who are creating a hope-filled future, and that we, the Jesuit university, accompany you in your creation of your future. It's about your hope. We don't give you that hope; you give it to yourself. We don't give you that hope-filled future; you create it. We accompany you by walking alongside you, mentoring you, teaching you what we know, supplying you with methods and skills and competencies, critiquing and evaluating you as is needed, essentially accompanying you by supplying you what you need and what you will use in your creation of your hope-filled future. Have no doubt about it; we are about hope, your hope, with our help.

A Jesuit education always starts with understanding context. The context of your lives as you begin your education is that, even though we don't feel it, the world objectively, factually, has gotten better and has made great progress in the time of your lives. Here are the facts: extreme

poverty has been cut in half; the world life expectancy has grown to 70 years; the number of deaths per year from natural disasters has greatly decreased; 80% of one-year old children are now vaccinated; on average worldwide 30-year old women now have nine years of education, catching men who have 10 years; 80% of people have access to electricity. On measure after measure of health, economy, wellbeing, security, opportunity, education, the world has gotten better in your lifetime.\* We are not nearly where we need to be; but we need to recognize that there is a context for a hope-filled future, even if for explainable, psychological and communication reasons we don't feel or know this. What does it mean for you if these years at Seattle U. through our accompanying education that you create a hope-filled future from within this context that, when objectively seen, gives so much hope because the trend is in the right direction?

There is one major exception of course—and it is not terrorism, or hostility, or migration—it is the opposite of progress in your lifetime in the degradation of the environment, the depletion of the planet, the warming of the climate, the extinction of species, the suffering especially of the poor from environmental disasters. The trend here is in the wrong way; it is not trending toward a hope-filled future. Hence the second thread in that Jesuit tapestry I want to highlight is: “To collaborate in the care of our common home.” That is a key objective, one of four, in anything that is Jesuit: “to collaborate in the care of our common home.” The “care of our common home” is a humble way to express what so threatens us and particularly your future. It personalizes the threats, the facts, the urgency in the words “our common home”, a home belonging to all of us, one meant to be lived in, and in the word “care” calling on all of us to act from our humanity, our hearts, our love. Again, note the verb—like “accompany” in the previous thread—the well-chosen verb “collaborate in”. Again we can't do it, and you alone can't do it; we must collaborate with hundreds of other institutions, agencies, organizations, movements, youth, governments. We must find what the best way is for us in our education and in our practices as a university and in your commitments to collaborate in this care of our common home which is so much bigger than anything the planet has ever faced. Your hope needs to be huge and matched with actions of the same size if you are to create a hope-filled future which includes this care for our common home.

Welcome to Seattle University. Welcome to the worldwide Jesuit family of committed persons. Welcome to a common mission as we accompany you in your creating a hope-filled future and collaborate with you and others in the care for our common home. This is a good place and a good day to begin your education as new first year and transfer students at Seattle University.

---

\* Cf. especially Hans Rosling, [Factfulness. Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World—and Why Times Are Better Than You Think](#); or Steven Pinker, [Enlightenment Now. The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress](#).