

Commissioning 2019

- June 15, 2019
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Thank you for inviting me to your commissioning and asking me to make some remarks.

I love to start off the Commencement Weekend with the Commissioning because of its solemnity, the depth of the commitment that is being made by these new officers, the pride of the families. I find it almost like a religious or prayer service to inaugurate the whole of the weekend with all of the celebrations of our graduates, their families and friends, and all of us as faculty, colleagues, and administrators at Seattle U.

This is a special occasion as it allows me, on behalf of Seattle University, to express our gratitude to Lieutenant Colonel Marty Lepak for his exceptional service as the leader of this ROTC program and as our Professor of Military Science. Marty, you have done a very good job and we wish you the best as you head to your studies at the War College.

Let me give a reflection on the meaning of the commissioning and what it calls you to for the future.

You enter upon a commitment of active service to your country, to its citizens, to the people it welcomes within its borders, and to the world through what our country represents and seeks to secure and guarantee.

You don't enter into a career that is primarily about you but rather one that is about others. There is a time in our lives to concentrate on ourselves, our education, our accomplishments, our own identities and self-understanding, how others respect and acknowledge us. This is an important period of our lives and it is necessary and natural. As infants, and children, and young persons we naturally focus on ourselves and our growth. We tend to think things revolve around us and how we are.

At some point in our lives—and I am claiming that this moment in your life is one of those points—we must pivot from a primary concern for ourselves to a care for others, a service of others, a putting of others first, ahead of our own needs. Many people do this through marriage, some through a calling or vocation of service, a few of us, like myself, do it through religious vows as priests, as nuns, as Jesuits. There are many ways to make this pivot from self to others. Your commissioning as officers requires you to make that turn. You no longer can put yourself first; you must put your soldiers, your comrades, the peoples they serve first.

This pivot does not succeed automatically by making marriage vows, or being sworn in as a judge or public servant, or inaugurated as a university professor or president, or by making religious vows. Nor does successfully pivoting from self to others come about by your commissioning today. We all do it gradually; we all fail; we never are done with giving primacy to the other. Any married partner can tell you this, any priest can, any officer in the Army can also tell you this.

You have not started this journey today toward the service of the other. You are already along it in your ROTC training. But today you publicly profess it and are held accountable to it.

From my experience and from the experience of others, know that there is nothing that brings greater joy in life than service of others. In fact, there is no road to the fullness of joy as a person except through care of and service of others. So with your commissioning know that what lies ahead of you is a great and incomparable joy in the service of others. When you fail, keep marching toward giving yourselves to others. The joy will come.

Know the thanks and the pride of Seattle University today, tomorrow in your graduation, and especially our thanks for your service to us all. And also know that with such a solemn and full commitment that you can count on our daily prayers.