

Commencement December 2011

On behalf of Bellarmine University's Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and alumni, please allow me to personally congratulate you on the successful achievement of your Bellarmine degree, and to welcome you into the distinguished association of the more than 20,000 of your fellow Bellarmine University alumni and alumnae throughout the world!

Today, over 300 of you graduate from Bellarmine with your respective graduate and undergraduate degrees. Every one of you is a unique and interesting success story. But to give you a sense of the character of your own group, allow me to celebrate seven of you in particular.

This evening, Simone Potts receives her doctorate in Physical Therapy. Simone is well known and loved at Bellarmine for many reasons, but particularly compelling for many of us is the love, courage, and generosity she evidenced by donating one of her kidneys to her best friend's mother – at the outset of her DPT program, an experience that Simone says will make her more empathetic and compassionate with her future clients.

In this Bellarmine spirit of being “men and women for others,” a fellow DPT graduate today, Jody Swimmer, played a key role in developing the West End Physical Therapy Clinic that Bellarmine University offers at the Catholic Enrichment Center at 33rd and Broadway.

Today, “AJ” Deng, receives his certification in Medical Laboratory Science. He was one of the group who became known as the Lost Boys of Sudan for the heroism and courage evidenced as they endured great suffering and hardship while fleeing from their war-torn home in the 1980s and resettled in the United States. AJ – Bellarmine University and the City of Louisville are grateful that you found us, and we are grateful that we found you!

Shevez Freeman receives her Bellarmine bachelor's degree in Communications. She joined the US Army at the age of 17, eventually spending a year in Iraq before deploying to Camp Doha in Qatar. After completing her military service, she was approved for an Army scholarship and enrolled at Bellarmine in 2009. Later this month, Shevez will add to her Bellarmine degree a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Signal Corps.

Narina Kasabova, also receives her bachelor's degree in Communications. A couple years ago, she decided to pursue a career in stand-up comedy, and currently is the youngest member of Louisville's Project Improv. She plans to move to Los Angeles to further pursue her career in comedy, and has promised that in her acts, she will never make fun of the Bellarmine administration!

Michael Scott has demonstrated great competence, leadership, and a commitment to excellence in a range of fields as he managed to successfully complete his Bellarmine MBA while also serving as an Assistant Coach for the now legendary NCAA Division II National Championship Bellarmine men's basketball team!

And tonight, please join me in celebrating Monica Zaring as she receives her bachelor's degree in Communications. Diagnosed with a form of dwarfism so rare that only eight other people in the world are known to have it, Monica has faced many obstacles and challenges in her life. In the process of doing so with great courage, Monica has impressed and inspired every one of us at Bellarmine with her fierce determination, boundless enthusiasm, and an especially profound and delicious sense of humor!

Please join me in recognizing and celebrating the great character, energy, gifts, and range of achievement in your class!

Allow me to conclude these congratulatory remarks with a few personal comments.

One of the most compelling metaphors in human existence is the metaphor of Light. Every person in this room is a great beam of light. Bellarmine University's crest shows a torch bringing the light of learning against the darkness of ignorance. Our search for meaning and for God is often described as our journey to the Light.

At Christmas, light and love came into the world as an infant born in Bethlehem.

The metaphor of Light also played a role in several recent personal conversations with a close friend in which, given certain circumstances of his life, we both were seeking the light that truth, love, and wisdom provides.

In the course of that conversation, I recalled a short poem that was brought to my attention a few years ago by a former college faculty member of mine at Notre Dame, Fr. John Dunne, C.S.C. – and I'd like to leave that with you as my Christmas gift of sorts and graduation encouragement.

As well-educated Bellarmine alumni now, of course, you certainly are familiar with metaphors, and with making sense of them within your own experience – so I won't try to interpret this quote for you – as you are more than capable of doing so for yourself.

The poem is called "The Gate of the Year," and it was written at the turn of the 20th century (in 1908) by the poet M.L. Haskins (1875-1957).

The Gate of the Year

M.L. Haskins

And I said to the man
who stood at the gate
of the year:

"Give me a light, that I
may tread safely into

the unknown!"
And he replied:
"Go out into the
darkness
and put your hand
into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you
better than light
and safer than a
known way."

Congratulations and Godspeed.
Dr. Joseph J. McGowan
President
Bellarmino University
December 14, 2011