

## **GRADUATION – FALL 2016**

Graduates and Friends, as we all reflect on the current election cycle – and, at times, shake our heads in collective disbelief – I am reminded of the communications standards most of us were taught, growing up. How easy it is to forget. Here at the Adler Graduate School, we have recently adopted official communications standards – which, along with our Vision and Mission Statements, are now posted prominently in every gathering space on our campus. I offer just a sample of these standards now, so that you can appreciate the type of learning and work environment we are striving to provide at the Adler Graduate School. Like most things, in life, it is a work in progress – but here is a sampling of the standards to which we aspire. I believe these standards apply to both our personal and professional walks and journeys.

- **In all communications, strive for that which helps, in any given situation; that is, those communications that add value.**
- **In all circumstances, strive to communicate in a manner that reflects your “better self”.**
- **Strive for composure in all communications.**
- **Strive for civility in all communications.**
- **Strive to courageously confront gossip whenever you hear it – do not rely on others to stand up to gossip. Strive to uphold the standard – “Talk to people – not about people”.**
- **Conduct conversations with everyone in such a way that if our students were listening you would be proud to stand behind your conversations.**

As I reflect on our current election cycle, I also find myself thinking about a note of welcome that apparently appears every Sunday in the church bulletin at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Community, located in Daytona Beach, Florida.

I am grateful to one of our Faculty Members, Tom Wright, who passed this very encouraging, uplifting and inspiring note of welcome to me. Again, this welcoming message comes from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Community in Daytona Beach, Florida. It goes like this.

**We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, gay, filthy rich, dirt poor, yo no habla Ingles. We extend a special welcome to those who are crying new-borns, skinny as a rail or could afford to lose a few pounds.**

**We welcome you if you can sing like Andrea Bocelli or like our pastor who can't carry a note in a bucket. You're welcome here if you're “just browsing.” just woke up or just got out of jail. We don't care if you're more Catholic than the Pope, or haven't been in church since little Joey's Baptism.**

**We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome soccer moms, NASCAR dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems or you're down in the dumps or if you don't like "organized religion," we've been there too.**

**If you blew all your offering money at the dog track, you're welcome here. We offer a special welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or are here only because grandma is in town and wanted to go to church.**

**We welcome those who are inked, pierced or both. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid or got lost in traffic and wound up here by mistake. We welcome tourists, seekers and doubters, bleeding hearts ... and you!**

I believe we can all learn from this note of welcome – this invitation.

In fact, this note of welcome – this loving invitation in the weekly bulletin at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Community reminds me that individuals, families, communities, whole countries, graduate schools and entire professions often fall far short of our vast potential for welcoming, embracing and serving others.

The Adler Graduate School's Vision Statement compels us – COMPELS US – to Transform Society Through Social Interest in Action. And our foundational theory – Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology – takes the position that one's relative mental health and well-being are best measured by one's corresponding level of Social Interest.

In all honesty, the mental health and educational fields have never done a very good job of serving the whole community – and, for that matter, graduate schools have never done a very good job of training professionals to serve the whole community. We've clearly only touched the edges of our potential. We can all do better. In fact, the health of our increasingly diverse community demands that we do a better job of addressing the needs of our ever-broadening community.

So.....I hope all of you – graduates, current students, staff and faculty and Board of Directors – I hope you will all accept the challenge of serving in those places and with those people and issues that others have feared. Like our friends at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Community.

I know I have said this many times – but it bears repeating. We have chosen what are often messy professions. You and I. Because it's messy work climbing out of the depths of mental illness or chemical dependency or homelessness or poverty. It's messy work dealing with problems in relationships or at school. It's messy work addressing the needs of children, the disabled, the abused, the elderly and those in demise. And it's sometimes even messy work gracefully and imaginatively and wisely providing for the diverse needs of our graduate students.

But...and, again, I have said this many times, if it weren't messy – if it was easy work – then it wouldn't be worth our time. If the people we are privileged to serve and teach would be just fine without us, then we should conclude we have better things to do.

But, of course, as our friends at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Community know, in their bones, we don't have better things to do than serve and teach others.

Political leaders have often inspired us to serve.

Early in his first term, President Barak Obama challenged all of us when he said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek".

And Winston Churchill once said....

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

Spiritual leaders have also admonished us to serve.

For example, Pastor James Forbes – a minister in the United Church of Christ tradition – puts it this way, "You can't get to heaven without reference letters from the poor."

And as John Wesley, the acclaimed preacher and founder of the Methodist tradition, said in the 1600s:

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can".

And, finally, leaders in our clinical fields and the psychological sciences speak of the importance of social embeddedness and social conscience. In fact, I am absolutely convinced that if Alfred Adler were sitting with us here today, I believe he would remind us about the essential importance of Social Interest. I believe he would also remind us that being able to recite Adlerian theory does not make you an Adlerian. There is a significant difference between knowing Adlerian Psychology and practicing Adlerian Psychology in your relationships, in your families, in your organizations, in your communities and country.

There's an old saying, "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car". No, reciting Adlerian theory does not make you an Adlerian.

Here at the Adler Graduate School, we want you to know Adlerian Psychology but, more importantly, whatever you do with your lives and careers, we want you to practice Adlerian Psychology. And you don't have to be an Adlerian scholar. In fact, if you are like me, you may not be an Adlerian Scholar, but you can know what it means to embrace Adlerian principles and to serve your communities through Social Interest. No, there is more to being an Adlerian than reciting Adlerian Theory. And if you remember nothing else that I have said today, I hope you will remember that.

And, please, don't assume that everyone who disagrees with you or approaches things differently than you is guilty of not being Adlerian enough.

I want to close by reading a brief but profoundly meaningful story. It's a true story; one that has obvious implications for healthy, integrated communities and – I would say – for our work in the human services and education fields. I believe this story reinforces the fact that we often miss opportunities to make a profound difference with the persons in our day-to-day orbits.

I believe this story also reinforces the fact that it is cool – very cool – to go to the thorny places – to do whatever is necessary to be of service – no matter where those thorny places and service opportunities might be.

Here's the story.

A NYC Taxi driver writes:

**I arrived at the address and honked the horn. After waiting a few minutes I honked again. Since this was going to be the last ride of my shift I thought about just driving away, but instead I put the car in park and walked up to the door and knocked.. 'Just a minute', answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.**

**After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 90's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie.**

**By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets.**

**There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.**

**'Would you carry my bag out to the car?' she said. I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman.**

**She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb.**

**She kept thanking me for my kindness. 'It's nothing', I told her. 'I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother to be treated.'**

**'Oh, you're such a good boy, she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address and then asked, 'Could you drive through downtown?'**

**'It's not the shortest way,' I answered quickly.**

**'Oh, I don't mind,' she said. 'I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice.**

I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. 'I don't have any family left,' she continued in a soft voice. 'The doctor says I don't have very long.' I quietly reached over and shut off the meter.

'What route would you like me to take?' I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator.

We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl.

Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, 'I'm tired. Let's go now'.

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico.

Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

'How much do I owe you?' She asked, reaching into her purse.

'Nothing,' I said

'You have to make a living,' she answered.

'There are other passengers,' I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly.

'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said. 'Thank you.'

I squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away?

On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life.

We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments.

**But great moments often catch us unaware-beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one**

**I want to read a few of this wonderful taxi driver's comments again - because he is really a therapist and educator at heart - and we can all learn something from his reflections - or at least be reminded of something profoundly important as we move through life and our professions.**

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Here at the Adler Graduate School, we are training an increasingly diverse student body, with increasingly diverse objectives, for service to an increasingly diverse community.

We are trying to do some unique things here at the Adler Graduate School and Jim Ramstad Community Service Center - merging higher education and civic engagement.

Once again, the Adler Graduate School's Vision Statement compels us to Transform Society Through Social Interest in Action...and, graduates, we look forward to your ongoing involvement as we seek to do just that.

Thank you for listening.