

**Office of the Chief Academic Officer
Loyola Marymount University**

First Year Academic Convocation

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***Sapere Aude* Dare to be Wise!**

Good afternoon. It is an honor to deliver the address at this inaugural First Year Academic Convocation. Like our entering class of 2009, I am new to Loyola Marymount University and like them, I am excited to be here and ready to get going.

SAPERE AUDE Dare to be Wise!

is the motto for the class of 2009. I like this motto so much that I have decided to use it as my motto as well; that I will Dare to be Wise in all I do. My esteemed colleagues on the LMU faculty and staff sitting in front certainly hope I will be both wise and especially generous in my actions.

SAPERE AUDE

I thank Prof. Matt Dillon for being my pronunciation coach. He's probably holding his head right now because I likely didn't get just the right inflection, but that is by no means his fault; I take full responsibility.

SAPERE AUDE

The phrase comes from Horace, who is considered the leading lyric poet in Latin. It is taken from his work entitled "The Epistles," and can be found in Book I, Epistle II. Quoting Horace:

"Why so quick to remove a speck from your eye, when
If it's your mind, you put off the cure till next year?
Who's started has half finished: dare to be wise: begin!
He who postpones the time for right-living resembles
The rustic who's waiting until the river's passed by:
Yet it glides on, and will roll on, gliding forever."

Horace is exhorting us to free ourselves from ignorance and have the courage to use our intellect.

This theme was later picked up by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who used *Sapere Aude* in his essay: "What is Enlightenment?" And, it subsequently became the slogan of the Enlightenment.

Dare to be Wise!

Let's do some analysis of this phrase.

What about the word dare? It has been defined as – to make bold; to take upon oneself; to act presumptuously; to be courageous enough to try or do something; a challenge to do something noble

or perhaps dangerous or foolhardy.

We, the caretakers of Loyola Marymount University, certainly wouldn't challenge you to do something dangerous or foolhardy. You'll face enough temptation without our help. What I want to emphasize here is courage. To have the courage to act upon what you believe to be the right course of action or inaction.

Now let's turn our attention to the word wisdom. Definitions of wisdom include:

accumulated knowledge or erudition or enlightenment; the trait of utilizing knowledge and experience with common sense and insight; the ability to apply knowledge or experience or understanding; the quality of being prudent and sensible.

Wisdom is often meant as the ability and desire to make choices that can gain approval in a long-term examination by many people. In this sense, to label a choice as "wise" implies that the action or inaction was strategically correct when judged by widely-held values.

I'd like to add a word to this phrase analysis and that is Compassion. Compassion can be defined as: a deep awareness of and empathy for another's suffering; the humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it; a prime virtue as when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it.

Compassion is empathy, not sympathy – it is the identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives.

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Dare to be wise, so we may have the courage and commitment to understand situations and predicaments and act upon them. May we have the compassion to put aside our own desires and be of help to others. May we have the perseverance to deepen our knowledge, so we can use the full power of our intelligence to be of service to others. May we work diligently to find solutions rather than excuses. May we learn how to take good care of ourselves, so we will know how to take care of others. And may we come to fully understand the Ignatian concept of Discernment, which is making correct choices in the context of faith.

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When thinking about this a phrase, I find it helpful to associate it with real people; people I have known. So, I'm going to tell you about two people, who I believe embody our motto: Dare to be Wise!

The first person I'm going to tell you about is Karen Wenzel. Karen was a non-traditional college student. She began working toward her baccalaureate degree when she was in her mid-forties.

After earning that degree, she began working on a master's degree and completed all of those requirements by the time she was in her early 50's. The following year, the school she graduated from was given a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development or HUD as it is known. The project was focused on helping people in economically deprived inner cities to work with a local university to create initiatives for empowerment and economic development. Previous to this project, the local university had been involved in a number of research projects in the inner city area and had not done much for the community beyond using it as a research laboratory. So, there was a fair amount of local suspicion about the HUD project; and why not? Here you had a combination of government funding and regulations and a university whose primary concern had been research, not community service.

In searching for a project coordinator, Karen was an obvious choice. She grew up in New Jersey and she had a tough urban energy about her. Karen knew it would be a challenge to get local residents to work with the university on the project, so as the coordinator she began taking walks through the neighborhoods and making friends with people on the street. Like many impoverished inner city neighborhoods, the crime rate was high, but somehow Karen was able to navigate the streets without a threat. When asked what her role was on the project, Karen would wink and say: "I'm a street walker."

Eventually, people began to trust her and listen to the purpose of the project and how it could benefit the inner city. Within a two year period, Karen worked with residents to establish two after school programs, a tenants' union in the local housing authority, a health clinic for women and children, an organization for grandparents' raising grandchildren, and a safe haven for homeless women and children. During these two years, hundreds of college students worked for the project as volunteers or interns. Karen took on the responsibility of training and mentoring most of them. Likewise, dozens of faculty also worked on projects and volunteered their time to help residents develop the initiatives they wanted for their community. At the end of two years, this project was becoming a great story, but as often happens in life, there can be tragedy. To

back up a bit, when Karen was in her late 40s, working on her bachelor's degree she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Even though the treatment was painful and difficult, Karen missed only one semester of school and had apparently beaten the cancer. But, in February 2005, she was diagnosed with a recurrence, not breast cancer, but cancer throughout most of her body, including her brain. Her doctors put her on a very radical and painful treatment regimen, undaunted Karen continued to coordinate the project for two more months. Finally, with a prognosis of but a few weeks left to live, she was too weak to continue her leadership in the project. On a cool spring day two weeks later, over 100 people crowded into the project office to dedicate the facility in Karen's honor. The ceremony was recorded on video tape and Karen was able to view the tribute. Three weeks later, the cancer took her life. A side note to this story is that Karen clung to life long enough to be told that she had become a grandmother. Her granddaughter was born in the morning and Karen passed away in the evening of that same day.

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Dare to be Wise!

Karen Wenzel, a middle aged women who had a goal of earning baccalaureate and masters degrees and to use the knowledge she gained from these programs to make a difference in depressed inner city neighborhoods, had the courage to use her intellect and skills to make a difference even as she fought for her own life.

Courage, Compassion, and Wisdom, and the drive to make a difference. The daring to be wise.

My second story is about Ann Campbell. Ann is not much older than you, our entering class of students. She earned her degree in Art History with a minor in Cinema in 2004. Even though her major would suggest otherwise, Ann has a deep commitment to healthcare especially for those who have little to no access. She also likes to travel. She has paired her love of travel and

film-making to develop documentaries of conditions she has found in developing countries in Africa and South America.

Last year, the VISA Corporation ran a contest called, "Great Ideas." There were four categories of great ideas to be funded. Any contestant rated in the top four in each of the categories would receive \$25,000 to help fund his or her great idea. The contest was posted on the world wide web so people from all over the world could vote. Ann entered the contest in the category of "Solving Social Problems." Her great idea was to build a children's clinic in Iquitos, Peru. Iquitos is a large and poor city without a health clinic that specializes in treating children. Ann posted her idea on the VISA website and communicated her idea to everyone she knew. She was covered as a major story in the local newspaper, but the paper's distribution was limited to a rural regional area. Nevertheless, her idea caught on. As happens so often in this internet age, people who had voted for Ann's idea told their friends about it via email, text messaging, and blogs. Before long, networks of people all over the world were reading Ann's great idea and voting for it.

By the time the contest ended, Ann was firmly in second place and earned the \$25,000 to help jumpstart her great idea. But, Ann is a patient person. She is finishing an accelerated baccalaureate program in nursing and working to get another \$25,000 donated to her project. She hopes to have \$50,000 to start the health clinic next summer. Knowing Ann as I do, I think she'll make her goal.

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Ann Campbell, a 25 year old women who could be living in Los Angeles working in the arts or film industry, enjoying the rich cultural and social life is instead studying to earn a degree in nursing with the intent to construct and run a clinic for children in a poverty stricken city on another continent. She indeed dares to be wise.

Intellect, Persistence and Patience, Compassion, Commitment. *Sapere Aude!*

Karen Wenzel and Ann Campbell, from two different generations with different backgrounds and educational interests both exemplify the courage to be wise. And like so many examples of the people we think of as wise, they achieve the extraordinary through ordinary means. And they can do this not because they are necessarily more intelligent, courageous, and compassionate than others, but because they are willing to work harder and longer than most other people.

To truly Dare to be Wise, you must dare to work as hard and as long as it takes to accomplish that which you believe must be done.

If you are familiar with the story of our patron saint, St. Ignatius, you know that as a young man he was anything but saintly in his behavior, but when he finally made the decision to be God's servant, nothing could stand in his way. He was completely willing to sacrifice himself to this mission and he did.

During your days here, you will regularly pass by the Jesuit Community. On some of those occasions, please take the time to look carefully at the statue of St. Ignatius. The attitude of the statue makes it look as if he is walking against a stiff wind, but look at the expression on his face: it is calm, it is peaceful, yet resolute, it is filled with wisdom.

So, you and I begin our mission here at Loyola Marymount University and we can give courage to one another in the work we have before us. I like to think that we have been brought here together because at Loyola Marymount, we can do more than develop our minds, we can develop our hearts, and a mind filled with intelligence and a heart filled with compassion fused together with a purpose to serve will accomplish great and helpful feats. But these two, the mind and the heart, must work together because no matter how bright and talented you are, and indeed you are, you will inevitably be known more for the goodness of your heart than for the goodness of your mind. Using your heart and your mind will lead you to

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The Daring to be Wise!

Deng Ming-Dao, the Taoist Philosopher wrote these words for young people like yourselves:

Remember you are always your own person. Do not surrender your mind, heart, or body to any person. Never compromise your dignity for any reason.

Maintain your health with sound diet, hygiene, exercise, and clean living. Money is never more important than your body and mind, but you must learn to work and support yourself.

Choose your friends and living situation carefully, for they will influence you. Find a mentor you can trust, one who can answer your questions, but never give up responsibility for your own life. No one lives your life for you.

A good education is always an asset.

Know evil, but do no evil yourself.

Emotions are transitory and are not a good way to make decisions. Everyday, you must make decisions. Everything you do will have an effect on your life. Before you go down any path, consider carefully. Rivers very rarely reverse course.

Good advice for us all.

Members of the class of 2009, when you see me around campus, please come up and introduce yourself and say the motto: *SAPERE AUDE!* It will be our greeting for the next four years and it will inspire us to have the courage and conviction to do good works. And, I'm certain that we will.

Thank you for your kind attention. I wish you a wonderful life here at Loyola Marymount University. And may God bless us all!