Bob Fonow ( Lampeter, 1979)

**Honorary Fellow**

**University of Wales, Trinity St. David**

**July 13, 2012**

**Remarks to 2012 Graduating Class**

Bore Da, Good Morning,

33 years ago, on this same day, July 13, 1979, in this same Arts Hall, I was in your place. And I was wondering “what next”? I didn’t have a job and my daughter, Nia Edwards Fonow, was born two months before final exams. But I believed that my degree from Lampeter was special – that it prepared me for any opportunity – or any challenge.

Just like you must have felt a few minutes ago, it was wonderful for me also to hear those beautiful Welsh words that received us as members of the University of Wales? That’s a significant achievement. But you and I know this: only a select few, only a very few, can graduate from Lampeter and Trinity St. David.

As you heard just a minute ago, I’m a turnaround manager and corporate troubleshooter. I get called when the situation is dire, when companies are deeply distressed and unlikely to survive. And somehow I’m usually able to make a contribution, and save jobs. At least so far – and in many countries.

People sometime ask me how I do this work? Well, I work hard and study hard, but I think it also has something to do with what I call Lampeter and Trinity St. David values.

What does that mean?

First, it has something to do with struggle and self reliance. This institution is nearing 200 years. It has always struggled to survive. At several dark moments the people in charge, and others, have found a way to survive and move forward. Often with very little help. That quality remains part of everyday life here. If you want to perform a play, you produce the play. If you want a sports team, you organize the sports team. Self reliance is a Lampeter value.

Second, there is a Trinity St. David spirit, founded upon a spiritual foundation, in many ways a very Welsh openness that all beliefs can be practiced without prejudice. Many of you will find this Lampeter value in the Chapel which is in the center of Old Building, the original College, but others might find it in the prayer room, or the extraordinary beauty of our campus and the surrounding hills, or the friendships that will last a lifetime.

The third Lampeter value is decency: a quality of kindness, consideration and fairness that is inherent in Trinity St. David life. I don’t mean a sentimental kindness, or a fake niceness. I mean manners, respect and collegiality.

Today the forces of greed, aggression, and intolerance have gained ascendancy. A winner take all attitude prevails. And every day we hear the bleakest of bleak words: austerity – a word totally without political imagination. These are seductive forces for some people, but destructive to a fair and moral society.

I can tell you from my experience in Iraq, rebuilding the country after the war, more recently in Palestine, and other turnaround assignments, that Lampeter values of kindness, consideration and fairness are much stronger forces.

When you leave here today you may feel that you face an uncertain future. You may. Let’s be honest. We are in a serious recession. But this place goes back a long time. You are part of its history now. Let me ask you to reflect for just a moment on the graduates who sat here in the summer of 1914, or the summer of 1939, or the Great Depression and other recessions over many years. They made contributions , and so will you.

Some of you have jobs already, some will go abroad, some will go on to further study. Others, just like me, may have a more difficult time getting started. I came to Lampeter as a mature student, almost 27 years old, after 8 years in the US military, and didn’t start my career until I was 32 years old. And it took many years to establish my career. These Lampeter values will sustain you as they have sustained me. With these Lampeter values you will be strong, and with these Trinity St. David values you will succeed!

Now, let me leave you with one last thought.

Do all of us a favor, and go out and get involved. Take our Trinity St. David degree and make the world a better place. Be a credit to our university, be a credit to your families, but most of all, be a credit to yourselves.

Congratulations. Good luck. And have a great life!

Bob Fonow

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