



INTEGRITAS

Wyoming Catholic College

ISSUE 1.1

2014 COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY MOST REV. JAMES D. CONLEY, D.D., S.T.L.

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF LINCOLN

Bishop Etienne and my brother priests, Dr. Roberts, dear graduates, your parents and your families, faculty, staff and students of Wyoming Catholic College, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What a joy and an honor it is for me to be here with you today in Lander, Wyoming. What a beautiful day this is, and what a beautiful place we're in to enjoy it. And what a joy to be in the company of such families. The families of graduates. The families of faculty. The family of Wyoming Catholic College.



When I was chaplain of the Rome campus of the University of Dallas, over the years I built friendships with many college students. Those friendships endure to this day. There were two extraordinary young people I remember well: authentic disciples of Jesus Christ—Sean and Becca Lewis. You know them well. And you know what loss they've suffered—their beautiful daughters Olivia and Emma. What a tremendous witness Sean and Becca are for real hope in Jesus Christ. Let us take a moment to pray together for the consolation of the Holy Spirit for the Lewis family.

We thank God for the witness of the Lewis family, to joy, grace, and hope, in the midst of extraordinary hardship.

During these days I have also had the honor of meeting the parents of Christine and Lorine Allen. A year ago I grieved with the Wyoming Catholic College community when I heard the news from Msgr. Seiker, your chaplain, of the tragic death of Christine in a hiking accident. I have since learned of the extraordinary contribution that Christine gave to the college during her freshman year, and of her humility, her desire for holiness, and her reliance on God's grace. Christine will be forever remembered at this college.

I want to thank you for honoring me with the Sedes Sapientiae Award. Our Blessed Mother possessed a kind of wisdom we can only hope to understand. She is the Seat of Wisdom, the Seat of Joy, the Seat of Charity. I am humbled to receive an award in her honor.

As many of you know, I am a convert to the Catholic faith. I entered the Catholic Church in 1975 during my undergraduate years at the University of Kansas. My godfather was Dr. John Senior, one of the three founders of the Pearson Integrated Humanities Program at KU.

Dr. Senior's name might be familiar to some of you. John Senior was a good and holy man. He understood the human person, the longings of the soul—the yearning for truth, for goodness, and for beauty. The Integrated Humanities Program was an effort to form young men and young women in truth—the truth of human nature; the truth of God's first book, the created world; the truth of natural law; the truth that comes to us through the divine and generous revelation of God the Father.

I became a Catholic because men like John Senior opened my mind, and my heart, to the incredible beauty, and truth, and goodness, of the Gospel. They did it in ways that will seem familiar to you—through music, and dance, and conversation, and hiking, and poetry.

Poetry, my dear graduates, opens our hearts and allows us to be born in wonder—Nascantur in admiratione. It opens us to an encounter with the God who speaks in the meter and rhythm of our very being.

I still remember the very first poem I ever memorized as a freshman in college. It was by that prolific poet, “anonymous,” and it goes like this:

*O western wind when wilt thou blow,
the small rain down can rain.
O Christ, if my love were in my arms,
and I in my bed again.*

Providence is a wonderful thing. In 2003, when conversations about Wyoming Catholic College began, many of those who served on the original Founders Committee were students of Dr. Senior. We remembered what we had experienced at KU—we remembered waltzes and stargazing, Latin and poetry recitation. We remembered that our hearts were opened—became alive—en-fleshed, as the Scripture says—when we learned to open our senses, our intellects, and our imaginations. We remembered what it is to be “born in wonder.”

Those experiences run through the philosophical vision statement of Wyoming Catholic College.

But Wyoming Catholic College is unique because it is Catholic—because its entire orientation is the salvation of souls—through the discovery of truth and what Pope Francis calls in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Gospel of Joy”) the *via pulchritudinis* (the way of beauty). A way that ultimately leads to a deep and intimate friendship with Jesus Christ.

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Wyoming Catholic College

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The philosophical statement of Wyoming Catholic says that this is to be a place where “youth may have the opportunity to undergo a life-changing conversion—a turning away from the nihilism of our age and a turning towards the objective supernatural and natural truths of faith and reason.”

What you have experienced here is among the finest kinds of education in the history of Western civilization. I don’t have to remind you that you are privileged. But more than being privileged, you are graced. In the Providence of God, you have received the extraordinary grace of an education at Wyoming Catholic College. The entirety of your lives will be shaped and formed by what you have experienced here.

But far more important than the trajectory of our mortal lives is the trajectory of our immortal souls. And the destiny of your immortal soul is a matter of the choices you will make when you leave Lander, Wyoming.

The philosophical statement of Wyoming Catholic College says that a Catholic liberal education produces a man who can freely direct himself to his proper end. That’s true. Today, I would like to talk for a few moments about our proper ends.

Many institutions of higher learning encourage their graduates to go forth into the world to be financially successful, to achieve prestige and power, and to secure a comfortable future.

However, this institution, Wyoming Catholic, has prepared you to direct yourselves to the ends and purposes proper to Christians. The gospel teaches us that the mission of a Christian is to “go out to all the world, proclaiming the gospel to everyone!”

As to the matter of money, my dear graduates, I have no idea whether any of you has much of it. When I graduated from college, I had none – I was broke! I suspect most of you are similarly situated. You may even be worried how you will pay off your education loans. But, remember this—by all the metrics that matter, because of your education and formation at Wyoming Catholic College, each of you is immeasurably rich.

The education and formation you’ve been given at Wyoming Catholic College is an extraordinary treasure. You’ve been given a special kind of Christian formation. You’ve been given access to the wealth of insight and knowledge that defines Western history. Your critical and rational faculties have been refined and tempered and polished. Most especially, you possess yourselves—in habit and discipline, and virtue, you possess a very real, and very rare, kind of personal freedom.

Each of you, dear graduates, has been graced with the most important kinds of richness. But what you do with the wealth of your formation is up to you.

When a rich young man approached Jesus, asking how he could obtain salvation, Our Lord told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor.

Those words inspired Francis of Assisi to embrace evangelical poverty, and to offer himself to the poor in service to Jesus Christ.

Those words inspired Teresa of Calcutta to leave the walls of her convent-school, and live among the poorest of the poor, tending to their sickness and hunger, while at the same time tending to their souls.

And they inspired our current Holy Father to take the name of Francis, and to reflect that “the Church is called to come out of herself and to go... to the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery. When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick.”

Jesus told the rich young man to sell what he had, and to give it to the poor, because he wanted to call him out of himself. He wanted him to know that our faith is fundamentally oriented towards others. When we become members of the Body of Christ, we enter into the passion of Christ—which means that we enter into a life that is missionary and a life that is evangelical. To be Christians is to pour our selves out, as Christ did on the cross, so that men and women made in God’s image can be reconciled to him—united with him in this world and in the next. The command to love others as we love ourselves is a command to bring the world to Jesus Christ—to make disciples of all nations.

At Wyoming Catholic College, you have not been given the kinds of riches that can be sold off. But the words of Our Lord—“sell what you have, and give it to the poor”—apply to you, and indeed to every Christian. To live the Gospel means to allow the richness of your formation at Wyoming Catholic College to be poured out for the salvation of souls. Whether material or spiritual possessions, will you give what you have to the poor and follow after Jesus Christ?

We’re living, as Pope Benedict said in 2005, in a world that has largely surrendered to a dictatorship of relativism. And the consequences of moral and cultural relativism are abundant. Among your peers, this is most borne out in the consequences of the technocratic materialism that dominates our cultural worldview.

Alice von Hildebrand writes that “never in the history of mankind has the average man had so many material possessions and yet never has he been more restless and unhappy.”

Technocracy spreads loneliness and unsettling individualism: we’re isolated by our screens, and social media, and streaming video. A world measured by Facebook “likes” and Twitter “followers” is isolating—we’re culturally conditioned towards self-promotion. But this often comes at the detriment of authentic human relationships. Our possessions are making us lonely.

And we face today a crisis of Christian imagination—of human imagination, in fact. We live in a tyranny of distraction. Technocracy ensures that we are constant consumers of content—without pause for reflection or contemplation. We’ve become, too often, like Odysseus’ lotus-eaters—unwilling and unable to examine our lives, or the world, or our relationship to God. We have become “flat-souled”: adventure, and romance, and poetry have taken a back seat to uninspiring “entertainment.” My good

friend Professor Anthony Esolen points out that our devices too often render us unable to carry on conversations, let alone to build friendships, relationships, or to pray.

The restriction of the use of technology here at WCC has been a benefit to you and has allowed you to come out of yourselves – away from your screens, as it were. Don't get me wrong, wise use of technology can be a good thing. But we can very easily become enslaved to our technology.

At times, the culture in which we live seems inimical even to the good life, let alone to authentic Christian life. But the formation you've been given has perfectly suited you to be missionaries in our times, and in our culture. Your riches are precisely what are needed for the poverty of our times.

WCC FAQ

WHAT DEGREE PROGRAMS ARE OFFERED BY WCC?

The College concentrates on offering a superlative education towards the degree of Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Liberal Arts, awarded to those who successfully complete our four-year integrated Great Books curriculum. We have no majors or minors, specialized degrees, or graduate programs.

In a world that is losing the capacity for conversation, you've spent years cultivating a sense of the poetic dialectic—the open, free, imaginative conversation in which “heart speaks to heart”—*cor ad cor loquitur*—one conversation at a time.

Among people who are hungering for relationship, you've seen the power of Christian friendship.

In a culture where adventure and romance and imagination are dying, you've climbed peaks, and swum rivers, and in so doing, you've discovered real masculinity, real femininity, true friendship and have glorified God in the process.

Your hearts have been moved to wonder, and joy, and peace at Wyoming Catholic College. The world needs the same thing. Blessed John Henry Newman once reflected that “man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal.” He said that “the heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination.” You, dear graduates, know the power of the imagination—of songs, and sonnets, of couplets and stories. Your hearts are alive in Jesus Christ. And the world is hungering for that life.

Dear graduates of Wyoming Catholic College—the world needs the Gospel. And you have been prepared to be its heralds.

In 1990, Pope Saint John Paul II said that in our culture, “economic well-being and consumerism inspires and sustains a life lived as if God did not exist.” He concluded that “what is needed now, is a ‘new evangelization.’” The New Evangelization is the proclamation of the Gospel to a world living as if God does not exist. It is that New Evangelization to which you are called. The things you have been given here—wonder, reason, friendship, beauty—these are precisely the things that will bring the world to Jesus Christ. Pour yourselves out, graduates—pour out the richness you've been given. If you wish for eternal life, use the treasure of this education to bring the world to Jesus Christ.

Some of you are called to leave Lander and enter seminary or religious life. In very specific ways, you'll become full-time missionaries of the Gospel. Praise God for that.

But all of you, no matter your particular vocation, are called to go into the world prepared, in the words of St. Paul "to give an answer for the hope that you have."

In August, Dr. Roberts, in his inaugural address as President of Wyoming Catholic College, called you to holy audacity and zeal, to become "modern apostles". He said that, "the time has come to get out of the trenches, to take up our intellectual and spiritual armor, and storm the fields for the Lord!"

Dr. Roberts was right. And he was especially right when he said that, "we must be people of love." Graduates, you're called to relationships, to friendships, to works of mercy that bring the world to the love of Jesus Christ. Mother Teresa knew, that what brought souls to Christ, was encountering them as human beings, worthy of time, worthy of attention, and worthy of love.

She tells the story of walking down a street in London, and encountering a drunk man—not homeless, or destitute, just drunk and alone. She took him by the hand, and looked him in the eyes, and asked him how he was doing. A tear came to his eyes—"Oh," he said "it has been so long since I have felt the warmth of a human hand."

"The most terrible poverty," said Blessed Mother Teresa, "is the feeling of loneliness and of being unloved." By that measure, we're living in very poor times. And the richness of your formation at Wyoming Catholic College can be the antidote.

The New Evangelization is the work of ordinary men and women who enter into the lives of their communities, with audacity and zeal, with joy and daring, ordinary men and women who can be the leaven that gives life to all. The New Evangelization is witness to the love of Jesus Christ in a world hungering to know him. You are the rich young men and women who must offer the treasure of your formation to the world.

You, if you choose to be, are the New Evangelization. You can be greater than you can even imagine. Do not be afraid to be evangelists for Jesus Christ. Do not be afraid to be "modern apostles." Do not be afraid to encounter the broken world, for the sake of truth. Do not be afraid to offer all that you've been given—to pour out your lives—for the salvation of souls. Ultimately, our lives will be measured by the souls we bring to Jesus Christ. Will the treasure you've been given serve that end?

Dear graduates, as I said earlier, your whole lives have been shaped by the formation you have received here at Wyoming Catholic College. How many other lives will be shaped by that formation? How many will know Jesus Christ because they have known you? Will you offer the treasure you've been given to the poor—and thus to Jesus Christ? Will the world be reborn in wonder, and will you make disciples of all nations?

Graduates, congratulations on your commencement. May God bless you abundantly!

INTRODUCING THE NEW “INTEGRITAS”

BY KEVIN D. ROBERTS, PH.D.
PRESIDENT



As I travel the country promoting the mission of Wyoming Catholic College, I am often confronted with the following question: “How can a small liberal arts college in Wyoming (of all places!) impact the world?” Some people may think I despise this question, but actually, I relish it, because history is on our side.

Consider what Jesus Christ did with twelve very imperfect men. And consider what those imperfect men did at, and following, the first Pentecost. To think that small numbers of active disciples cannot influence others is to reject every lesson from salvation history.

More recently, in 1997, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger commented, “Maybe we are facing a new and different kind of epoch in the church’s history, where Christianity will again be characterized more by the mustard seed, where it will exist in small, seemingly insignificant groups that nonetheless live an intense struggle against evil and bring good into the world.”

For that reason, this year Wyoming Catholic College is expanding its reach, sharing the expertise, zeal, and audacity that befits a precocious, adventurous institution. With several thousands of our closest friends now receiving our revamped “Integritas,” we will accelerate and expand the impact WCC has on our culture, our country, and our Church.

Each month, we will feature a speech given at our campus, or at a College-sponsored event. As you will see, we are deeply engaged not only in matters of faith and theology, but in particular, how our faith and theology ought to be lived out—actively and zealously—in the public square.

As Bishop James Conley remarks in this inaugural edition, “our lives will be measured by the souls we bring to Jesus Christ.” I cannot help but believe that the Lord wants our College’s impact to be measured by what we offer our students as well as our friends and supporters around the world.

If you gain a sense that we’re an energetic bunch with a bit of Wyoming swagger in our evangelization, then you’d be right. All we want to do is to inspire others to get out of the trenches and storm the fields for the Lord. Saddle up, and welcome aboard. History is on our side.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.