



The Inaugural Address of Daan Braveman

Ninth President of Nazareth College

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"Making a Difference: Community and Commitment"

Those of you who know me well will not be surprised to learn that as I sat here and looked out I could not help but think of a song. The song is a simple one, one that we played over and over again when our son Adam was a young child, and I am sure it is familiar to many of you. I will not embarrass myself by singing it but the words are these: "Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other gold." As I look out, I see my new friends at Nazareth who have so warmly welcomed Lorraine and me to our new community. It is always awkward to single out individuals but I want to mention two who could not be here but are among the silver: former President Bob Miller and his wife Jan Miller. During the transition period, Bob and Jan graciously provided assistance and advice. More important, under their leadership during the past seven years, the College grew not only in land size and enrollment but also in academic programs and reputation. And the College did what few institutions have been able to accomplish: it grew while at the same time enhancing the overall quality. Even though they are not able to be here, I want to thank them publicly.

I am very pleased that our old friends are here as well -- friends from childhood, from college, from law school, from my days as a lawyer and our dear friends from Syracuse. These old friends mean so much to me and will always be the gold. Among the gold are my family members, including my sister-in-law and brother in law, sister, niece, and mother-in-law, Bea Winn. My dad is also here and he taught me many things, including and especially the love of learning and the importance of trying to make a difference in the lives of others. Two are here in memory: my father-in-law, Mort Winn, who if he were here would have a grin from ear to ear and would be thinking --"maybe my daughter did not make such a big mistake after all;" and my mother, who would be the most proud person in the world today. I can also be certain she would

have spent the past two months baking for today's reception. Finally, there is the gold even among the gold -- Lorraine and Adam — who together have taught me what is truly important in life.

To all of you –to the silver and the gold—I want to give my most sincere thanks.

I selected for the title of my talk, “Making a Difference” and since I come from an academic tradition that insists on colons in the title, the full title is “Making a Difference (colon): Community and Commitment.”

In thinking about what to say I was reminded of a story I read about a year ago in a law review article.¹ With my embellishments, the story goes like this. Sherlock Holmes and Watson decided to go on a camping trip and they traveled to the marvelous Lake District in England, found a camping spot near one of the beautiful lakes, and pitched their tent. After dinner, they sat around a campfire drinking some wine and then retired to the tent for the night. In the middle of the night, Holmes poked Watson and said. “Watson, look up and tell me what you conclude.” Watson paused for a moment and then said, “Holmes, I see millions of stars; I can see the Milky Way and tonight I can see the Northern Lights. The beauty is overwhelming and I conclude that this could not have happened by accident.” Watson then turned to Holmes and asked, “Holmes, what do you conclude?” And Holmes replied, “Watson, I conclude that someone stole our tent.”

I am reminded of this story because in preparing these remarks about Making a Difference I want to keep one eye on the stars, on the larger picture, but the other on the Nazareth tent.

Let me begin by explaining what I mean by “making a difference.” Many years ago, I heard a speech by bell hooks, a scholar known to some in this audience. hooks's speech was about the problems facing women of color throughout the world, and at the end of her speech a student in the back of the room raised her hand to ask a question. The student observed that the problems seemed overwhelming, and she asked how she could possibly have an impact –how she could

¹ Marc Galanter, *The Vanishing Trial: An examination of Trials and Related Matters in Federal and State Courts*, 1 *J. Empirical Legal Studies* 459, 531 (2004).

make a difference. hooks responded by mentioning that a week or so prior to the talk she was standing in line at a grocery store waiting to check out. The woman in front of her had a cart-load of groceries and was trying to place them on the belt while at the same time holding an infant who was crying and fidgeting. bell asked the woman if she wanted bell to hold the baby. The woman gave bell the baby (who then quieted down), unloaded her cart, checked out, and thanked bell as she took her baby and left the store. The point of this story, bell told the college student, is that we all operate in spaces and within those spaces we have the opportunity to make a difference in someone else's life.

Academic institutions operate in relatively large spaces and have that capacity as well. Indeed, we have enormous opportunities to make a difference in the lives of our students, faculty, staff, alums, and friends, as well as in the lives of those around us. Ernest Boyer, who was the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of A teacher for nearly 20 years and, in my view, one of the distinguished educators of the past decades, he challenged all of us involved in education to make that difference. He observed "what is needed (for higher education) is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life."²

Most importantly, Boyer recognized that to achieve this larger purpose, colleges must commit to create a renewed sense of community. He detailed the elements of what he meant by community³ but for me the four essential ingredients are the following:

First and most important, a college must be a community that is dedicated to **discovery and learning**. As I look to the stars, I see a learning community that integrates a strong liberal education with professional education, providing students opportunities to develop a greater self-awareness as well as a deeper understanding of the world around them. It is said that our goal is to produce critical thinkers, a term that is often used but not often defined. For me, the best definition was offered by a Syracuse colleague, Jim Wiggins, who once observed that good

² See Mary Jane Brukardt, et. al., *Calling the Question: Is Higher Education Ready to Commit to Community Engagement I* (2004).

³ See E. Grady Bogue, "An Agenda for Common Caring" in William McDonald and Associates, *Creating Campus Community: In Search of Ernest Boyer's Legacy* 8-10 (2002)

thinking skills give the student the ability to get from A to B; critical thinking skills, on the other hand, enable the student to assess whether that journey is worth making.

The kind of campus community that I envision must also be *inclusive*, embracing diversity among students, faculty and staff--a diversity that cuts across lines of color, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual preference. The inclusive community teaches the importance of respect and concern for others, and recognizes that a diverse environment enhances the educational experience of *all* students. An inclusive community also promotes the most fundamental need for freedom of expression and thought.

The third ingredient is a commitment to *community engagement*. I believe that institutions of higher education have an obligation to be involved in issues affecting people in the local area, the region, the country and the world. To be sure, such engagement makes a difference in the lives of those impacted. But, links between the academic institutions and the community serve additional purposes as well. Such links provide opportunities for students to see how their classroom studies relate to the real world; they expand the perspectives of students, often giving college students opportunities to discover and better understand issues of poverty, race, and class. By making community engagement an essential ingredient of the college experience, we instill in students a sense of civic responsibility, which they hold throughout their lives.

A final ingredient of the campus I see when I look up is what Boyer and others have referred to as a *celebrative community*. Institutions are like people, and like people they must find ways to recognize and honor the many and varying achievements and contributions of all—the students, the faculty, the staff, the Trustees, and the alums.

I believe deeply that a college can truly make a difference when it has a real focus on learning and discovery, on inclusion, on community engagement, and on recognition of its achievements.

Let me now turn my attention to the Nazareth tent. Over the past three months I have been holding meetings with groups of faculty, staff, students, and trustees, and I have learned a great deal about the School's history, traditions, values, challenges and dreams for the future. I learned

that this College was founded for the very purpose of making a difference in the lives of others. Many years ago, at the dedication of the Weider Service Learning Center, it was said (and I quote) that “Nazareth College is about opening hearts and providing opportunities for students to see the needs of others and develop the compassion to use their gifts to meet some of those needs ... to work for justice for all.”

This is an institution that is committed to community. Every group I met with mentioned in some way the importance of maintaining a sense of community. I asked the students why they selected Nazareth and what they like the best about the College, and their answers were uniform. They were attracted to the school because of the felt sense of community, the concern of all they met when they visited the school. And, once here, they found that this indeed is a community. One staff person proudly mentioned that this is the kind of place where if you are asked for directions you are more likely to walk with the other person to the destination than merely give directions.

My discussions also revealed, however, that there are challenges presently facing the college. The growth over the past years has placed stress on the ability to maintain that important sense of community, reminding us that we must consciously and continually work to further the four elements of a campus community.

With respect to a community that emphasizes excellence in *learning and discovery*, there is no doubt but that the faculty has a genuine commitment to the success of its students. Again, in my meetings with students they uniformly praised the faculty and the learning experience. We cannot let growth strain that commitment. We have opportunities as well in building a learning community. A rather unique feature of Nazareth—one that sets it apart from many other similarly sized liberal arts colleges-- is that we offer a strong liberal arts education while also offering equally strong professional education. In some areas we have effectively integrated the two but I think we have an opportunity to become a leader in showing how all the wonderful aspects of a liberal arts education —the critical thinking skills, the multidisciplinary understandings, the comprehension of ethics and justice--- can be integrated with and contribute to the development of professions and professionals.

With respect to an ***inclusive community***, Nazareth has identified inclusion as one of its core values. The challenge, however, is to make that stated value a principle of action. We must commit to increase diversity among the student body as well as the faculty and staff. In this global world it is imperative that our students be exposed to differences and that they learn not simply to tolerate difference but rather to embrace it as a wonderful source of strength.

Nazareth is already an ***engaged community*** and I am pleased that over 90% of our students are involved in some kind of volunteer work in the local community. During orientation week, we instill the importance of service by devoting a day to community work, and this year we had 500 students, faculty and staff cleaning, painting and preparing classrooms, bowling with children, boxing shoes for the Reuse-a-Shoe recycled art project, sorting back-to-school supplies for children in need, staffing arts and crafts booths at child daycare centers, washing windows and ambulances, and staffing youth and family oriented carnivals. During the school year many of our students work with children in the local schools throughout the community, offering much needed tutoring and mentoring. Like many other schools across the nation, we have recently undertaken a number of activities to assist those who were devastated by natural disasters, namely the recent hurricanes.

In the area of engagement, I believe we have some challenges and opportunities as well. We need to find additional ways to integrate community work with academic programs so that engagement becomes ingrained in the fabric of the learning process. Students need opportunities to reflect on what they see when working in the community, to assess how their experiences relate to what they are learning in the classroom, and to think how they might strive to change conditions for others. Community service should not be something that we do in addition to learning but rather should be a vital part of the learning process.

Finally, as a ***celebrative community***, we can find additional ways to recognize and honor the achievements of individuals and of the institution as a whole. In my discussions over the past few months I often heard that Nazareth is a hidden gem. We should continually polish that gem and, equally important, we should take it out of hiding.

In the near future we will begin a planning process that will address the challenges lying under the Nazareth tent. To be sure, there are specific issues that will be addressed—issues relating to such matters as staff and faculty workload, to incorporation of the latest technology, to an effective campus wide communications network, to opportunities for professional growth, to the need for new facilities, to implementation of the academic restructuring, to matters of governance and to curriculum decisions about the core.

In addressing such specific issues and others, however, I hope we do not lose sight of the larger picture, of the need to fortify a sense of community -- a community, which at its heart, is committed to excellence in learning, to inclusion, to civic engagement and to celebration. It is a community in which each individual, as well as the institution as a whole, will, like bell hooks, seize the opportunity to hold the baby, seize the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others.

Because I began with a song, it seems appropriate that I should close with a one as well. And, while it may seem otherwise, I still have not been here long enough to sing the words. It is a song that a number of my gold friends sent to me after the announcement of my appointment as President:

“I pulled into Nazareth, was feelin’ about half past dead;
I just need some place where I can lay my head.
Hey, mister, can you tell me where a man might find a bed?
He just grinned and shook my hand, and no, was all he said.”⁴

The difference between my experience and the song is that when I got to Nazareth you offered a place to stay. And, for that I am deeply grateful. Thank you.

⁴ “The Weight” by The Band