

**Olivet College Commencement
President's Remarks
Steven M Corey, PhD, President
May 14, 2016**

A Challenge: Be the Responsible Leader Our Communities Need

As I begin my remarks, let me first extend congratulations to our graduates. Over the course of the next hour or so you'll be transitioning from Olivet College students to Olivet College alumni. This represents the culmination of a tremendous amount of work, significant accomplishment, and is the result of a long series of decisions and commitments you've made over the past several years that have led you to this point here today. Congratulations!

This transition also provides you with an opportunity to reflect on your experiences here as an Olivet College student, the knowledge you've gained, skills you've developed, and values you've adopted as a member of this college community. A choice before you, as you head out into the world to take on the next phase of your adult and professional life, is how you will apply your gained knowledge and skills and what values will you embrace and promote as you become even more individually responsible for yourself and others.

So today I'd like to take this opportunity to challenge you to be the responsible leader that our nation and communities so desperately need. Your Olivet College experience has equipped you with this ability; you simply must commit to it and then work to hone your skills and abilities to do so.

Before going further, I'd like to share my observation of the current context that this year's presidential primary campaigns offer us. Fortunately, or unfortunately, every four years we get the opportunity to have bold examples of leadership thrust before us in ways that can't be ignored. Our aspiring, although not always inspiring, national leaders are on display 24-7; they're on TV, radio, all over the internet, on Facebook, Twitter, on yard signs, bumper stickers, and buttons. We get to observe them posture and position themselves before us over an extended period of time in a fully immersive sort of way.

So, with this rich and extensive exposure to what should be some of our most experienced and highly effective leaders in the world, what can we conclude about the state of leadership in our country today? Unfortunately, I conclude that we're learning more about what leadership should not be much more than a model for what it should be.

This primary season has seen a tone which lacks courtesy, reaching outright rudeness. Disrespect for others has easily and often extended to hatefulness. The use of fear as a means to divide people rather than to bring them together runs rampant as candidates seek to build personal power over others through a fear response, where the "we" must protect ourselves against the "them." All too often this is being posed as a "you must lose for me to win"

scenario. Much of this is about posturing and positioning rather than thoughtful responsiveness and complex problem solving for the betterment of all. In the end, we're seeing an overall approach that is about success for oneself at all costs, not about success for "me" as achieved through success for "us."

We're hearing that this is because people are disenfranchised, have been left behind, struggling to achieve the American Dream, angry, or maybe even just plain pissed off. You know what... this may be true. In fact, let's agree that a significant number of Americans do feel this way. This doesn't warrant misbehavior and irresponsible actions on the part of our supposed leaders. In fact, it calls for the exact opposite.

This is precisely the time when responsible leadership is needed most. This is true for our nation, our state, our cities, companies, civic organizations, schools, and families. When times are difficult and people are hurting and struggling, this is a time when true leaders, effective leaders, responsible leaders step forward in responsible ways that bring people together to solve difficult and complex problems, where all win, not where some win and others lose.

Responsible leaders start with a commitment to acting with honesty and integrity. Those who are familiar with the Olivet College Compact know this part well. Words and actions are grounded in basic honesty, not a brutal honesty that's delivered in a manner without regard to its impact on others, but a caring honesty delivered with integrity and a commitment to the betterment of others. Responsible leaders commit to the wellbeing of all others, including their detractors and not just to those that agree and support them. Responsible leaders commit to collective success, using their individual success to advance the betterment and success of others. Responsible leaders work to be empathetic, selfless, and humble, putting their ego aside. They motivate and inspire others through a positive vision for the future and the collective good, not out of fear of an enemy. Responsible leaders are victors over their circumstances, not victims of circumstance. They refuse to be defined as a victim and challenge others to adopt a similar perspective as empowered parts of a solution, rather than victims which define the problem.

Now, we must recognize that we face serious challenges that seem to elude ready solutions. Frustration with the current condition is real and must be addressed. Some have seemingly "won" while others fall further behind. This is serious and requires serious responses from responsible leaders. It's not easy.

Graduates, as you go forward from the event center you, too, will face challenges and obstacles; that's the nature of life, of business, of our modern societies today. You will be placed in positions of leadership, in your companies, communities, and families. These also will be serious situations, requiring serious responses, with serious consequences.

So, you, too, are going to face this essential choice. What kind of leader are you going to be? What values will you hold onto and use to guide your approach?

I'm encouraging you to make the commitment now; hold onto your Olivet College values encapsulated by a commitment to Individual and Social Responsibility and the Olivet College Compact. Commit to holding yourself individually responsible and use your success to advance the betterment of others. Commit to acting with honesty and integrity. Remember that relationships form the basis of society and our work together and that we need to be bringing people together, not dividing them so that we can conquer. A commitment to empathy, selflessness, and humbleness goes a long way in keeping these values at the forefront, even in the toughest of times.

If you commit to these values and to being a responsible leader, you will be extraordinary, special, and will make a lasting positive difference on your family, your organization, and your community. Expect these things of yourself and of others around you. It will make a difference.

So, congratulations on your graduation today and may you find tremendous success as you embark on the next set of adventures in your lives. You've got something special in an Olivet College education that many others don't have. Take pride in it. Enjoy it. Use it to its fullest potential to advance yourself, your families, and your communities in the years to come.

May God bless each one of you and this great college.

Thank you.