

Margaret Botch, SP
Honorary Doctorate in Humanities Conferred on Sisters of Providence
Seattle University - June 15, 2008

It's Not About Me, It's About We

President Sundborg, Provost Eshelman, Trustees and Regents of Seattle University, distinguished faculty and staff, the Graduating Class of 2008, alumni, parents and friends . . .

It is a joy to be here with you this morning for the 2008 Undergraduate Commencement of Seattle University. And it is an amazing joy to be among the Sisters of Providence who accept an honorary doctorate in humanities from Seattle University. Many more sisters would have liked to come to Qwest Field, but could not do so. They are here in spirit; and they will hear all about this ceremony.

Our community is *honored* to be called *Doctor of Humanities*. It feels like you are recognizing the wisdom of the pioneers who preceded us. Remembering how they lived and worked, like studying the great stories, ideas and decisions of scholars, helps us respond to challenges we meet today. Thank you for calling us to this, and thank you for honoring these sisters and all of us by conferring this degree.

Seattle University is *alma mater* for many Sisters of Providence, including Sister Shirley Smith and me. Sister Karen Hawkins is currently pursuing a master's degree. Providence Sisters have also served as faculty members: Sister Christopher Querin, who died March 13th, and Sister Alice St. Hilaire, who is in the audience, are among them.

Most significant, in relation to accepting this honorary degree in humanities, is the truth that with Seattle University we share a common history and mission. Sister Karin Dufault, recently active with an advisory committee for the School of Nursing, impressed me with the quality of the nursing program, when she declared: "The Providence legacy is alive and well."

Graduates, you are receiving *earned degrees* today. Seattle University marks your achievement, *what you did*. So each one you, as an individual, can be proud of your *earned bachelor's* degree. *Graduates*, we sisters join Seattle University, your families, and friends to congratulate each of you for what you have accomplished.

Compared to your degree, our *honorary degree* looks unusual. The usual requirements, like matriculation, classes, study, and passing exams, are waived; and the Board of Trustees, on the recommendation of the President, grants the degree to someone whom the President and the Trustees regard as having made significant contributions to the region, the nation, or the world through their service or achievements.

The honorary degree has a symbolic function. Honorary degree candidates, by their life or work, represent ideals and values that university seeks to foster and model. Whoever receives such a degree acts as a kind of mirror for the University. Although conferred on us, it reflects the values of Seattle University and its hopes for those who graduate from this institution. As Father Sundborg said in announcing the honorees for this year: "*I strongly believe that who you choose to honor says a lot about who you strive to be, as a university.*"

Graduates, the Trustees' choice to *honor us Sisters of Providence* says a lot about you. It says who the university believes you are, or will be, or need to become as 2008 graduates of Seattle University.

What does Seattle University strive to be? What about you as a graduate?
The mission states that the university is dedicated to educating the whole person, to professional formation, and to empowering leaders for a just and humane world. The vision includes academic quality, Jesuit Catholic inspiration, and service to society.

So, how do the Sisters of Providence reflect Seattle University? How does honoring us sisters connect the mind with what matters? And what does that say about you?

Founded in 1843, *Sisters of Providence*, a community of Catholic women of faith, responded to needs of society's poor and vulnerable. They came West in 1856 and to Seattle in 1877. A year later they had Seattle's first hospital up and running. By 1907 the cry of society's poor and vulnerable demanded that the sisters begin Providence Hospital School of Nursing to meet needs of the sick and the education of young women ready to serve them. By 1935 the school was thriving and Providence was well placed to collaborate in forming Seattle University (then College) Department of Nursing Education.

Evolving realities from, 1877, 1907, 1935 and the intervening years have brought us to today. On June 15, 2008 what was once Providence Hospital is Swedish Cherry Hill. It houses the Clinical Performance Lab for SU Nursing Students in the James Tower Life Sciences Building. What was the nursing education department is now the Seattle University College of Nursing. It sits at the center of campus in the renovated historic Garrard Building. As Sister Karin Dufault said, the Providence story, our legacy, lives here.

In Seattle our legacy, our story also continues at Providence Mount St. Vincent, Heritage House at the Market, Providence Hospice of Seattle, Peter Claver, Vincent and Gamelin Houses, Providence Elderplace, Providence Home Services, Sojourner Place and Providence Hospitality House -- places where a few sisters and many other people, including *some of you*, are employed or volunteer as you put flesh on what you learn in the University.

Seattle University chose to honor the Sisters of Providence to recognize our community's longstanding commitment to the health care profession in the Seattle area and our joint history with Seattle University in Nursing.

Only a few of you are or will be in health care or nursing. Many of you did not come from Seattle, and most of you won't stay in Seattle for the rest of your lives. But soon or in the future -- whether in healthcare, business, science, art, politics, anthropology, education or another field -- whether in Seattle or in distant places, *your Seattle University Education will connect your mind – what the deep reality of you knows, values, and believes -- to what matters.* We sisters witness to that.

For Sisters of Providence what matters is God watching out for absolutely everything that exists; and it is us, being the best human faces of God that we can be by living what Jesus Christ taught and lived. For you, a Seattle University graduate, it could matter that you are, or will grow into being, a whole person educated in the Jesuit Catholic tradition.

For us sisters what matters is to live and work together and to work and live for others. We welcome diversity, and we open a door-- a hospice, hospital, hospitality -- to all in need, and also to those wanting to serve others in need. For you, a Seattle University graduate, it could matter that you participate in a profession, a family, and a society where you will bring what you know, value and believe into open conversation with people like you, but also with people who see the world from a different perspective.

For us sisters what matters is being able to turn buildings into places of refuge and healing, and making sure that people find a home, that the sick receive quality care, and also that the next generation knows how to do these things even better than we. For you, a Seattle University graduate, it could matter that you are now competent to make a difference and that you will become increasingly able to use what you know toward a just and humane world.

I have talked about how the degree the Sisters of Providence received demonstrates what the university stands for and what it hopes that you will be. I want to add that, this year, the Trustees' choice expresses the university's motto, *connecting the mind with what matters* in a different way.

Graduation 2008 happens in a time characterized by a cult of celebrity. Oprah Winfrey, Al Gore, Barack Obama., Britney Spears... Popularized in the media celebrities become known for their achievement – or sometimes celebrities become known for being known.

Seattle University didn't choose to honor a celebrity at this 2008 undergraduate commencement. The trustees *did* choose *to honor achievement. Achievement matters*, so the Trustees chose to honor longstanding commitment, and leadership *by the Sisters of Providence.*

But here's the surprise! Not one of us, but *all* of us Sisters of Providence, are honored. It's like awarding the prize to the Nobel Laureates. Since 1901, 777 individuals have been awarded the Nobel Prize. And twenty times since 1901 organizations have been the laureates. This signals that people don't achieve things alone. In honoring all of us, Seattle University also recognizes that *community* matters. *It is not about me, it's about we.*

Earlier I congratulated you, graduates, on the personal achievement that your degree represents, recognition of what you have accomplished. At the same time, I imagine that each of you can and must name many people – friends and family, instructors and financiers, who have made your achievement possible. I can further imagine that *you* with your Seattle University education *see how it truly matters* that a group of people, receive an honorary degree at your commencement!

At graduation time a couple years back I overheard a conversation: “*Well now, what do you want to do with your life?*” The response? “*I want to be a celebrity!*”

2008 Graduate -- Sometime in the future you *may* be a celebrity, but my guess is that, as a graduate of Seattle University you do won't aim for celebrity status. I expect that you will aim to accomplish good things that matter and I hope that our country and our world may gain a great deal from what you are able to achieve. I also believe and hope, 2008 Graduates, that in connecting your mind – what you have gained at this university -- with what matters you will also remember that “*It's not about me, but about we.*”