

“Making the Point” Speech by Dr. Sue Crider Atkins at Point Loma Nazarene University’s Undergraduate Convocations, May 16, 2009.

Thank you, President Brower and trustees, colleagues, family and friends of the graduates, and you ,our graduates, for the honor and privilege of being called to spend these few moments “Making the Point.”

Graduates of the class of 2009, you will remember your senior year for many things—the friends you made with whom you will do everything to keep in touch, the faculty and staff who prodded and pulled you to the finish line, the family members who sacrificed so much for you to be here, the church folk who encouraged you and prayed you through.

But one key historical event of your senior year will stand out — and I don’t mean the day they took your cafeteria trays away – 2009 was the year Barak Obama became president of the United States.

Now President Obama and I don’t have a lot in common. He’s a tall, skinny, dark guy and pretty hip; I’m a tall, skinny, pale female, and pretty hippy. He likes dogs. I like cats. He uses a Blackberry; I enjoy eating them. We both enjoy basketball, but I think I could take him at tennis. And, yes, he is president of the United States, but, like most professors, I’m pretty sure I know how he should run the country.

President Obama and I are doing one thing alike this weekend. We’re both giving speeches at graduations; in fact, we’re both speaking at colleges sponsored by church denominations. That’s risky you know. President Obama’s invitation to speak at the University of Notre Dame has been somewhat more controversial than mine —but I’m not finished yet.

As surprising as it may seem, sometimes sponsoring denominations and university personnel don’t always agree on those who should be invited to speak on campus or on the kinds of issues that should be discussed.

President Obama didn’t share an advance text of his speech with me, but I’m pretty sure he and I will say a number of the same things. We will both encourage you graduates that despite the economic crisis, despite the problems in the job market, despite the challenges ahead, you can make a difference! In fact, that you must make a difference.

Let me hear you say: “Yes, we can!”

But how will you do it? . . .

You’re young, enthusiastic, energetic, and you’ve had a great education. But you can’t change your world on your own. Remember to surround yourselves with wise counselors and friends of good character, and I would add a solid church community with whom you can continue to learn and grow. These college years are just part of a life-long learning process, so be flexible for the twists and turns that lie ahead. If you talk to most old people, you’ll find none of us really ended up where we thought we were going, so enjoy the ride!

My own biggest adjustments didn’t come until I was 52 and went from being a life-long single teaching in a small rural college in western New York to a newlywed adjusting to the strange ways of a New Zealand husband. One can only learn so much about rugby, cricket, yachting, and Vegemite, rather than peanut butter, on toast without getting just a little culture shocked.

Barak Obama and I will both talk about the need for change – at PLNU we call it “transformation,” not just for the sake of change, but a true transformation of our values. We will both decry greed and its

disastrous results. If the struggling economy should be teaching us anything, it is that life is not about the “toys” we accumulate before we die, but the relationships we build for eternity.

I certainly learned that lesson early in 2007 with a diagnosis of breast cancer and the subsequent lumpectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation. You my students and you my colleagues taught me a lot through your care and prayer and laughter and tears in the midst of it all. I’m not sure I wanted that particular “transformation” – bald is NOT really my best look – but I’m pretty sure I’m a better person on this side of that bend in the road than I was before it.

The president and I will both recommend that you engage in service to others. But PLNU students, I don’t need to tell you about what we call “servanthood” around here. With your love missions around the globe and your ministries on the streets and in the neighborhoods of San Diego and across the border, you have demonstrated your compassion in so many ways. I know you will continue to seek worthy causes to express your passions and your gifts.

But, finally, let me suggest one big difference between what Barak Obama and I will say to you the class of 2009 this weekend.

President Obama is a politician. He serves the state. He won’t feel himself free to remind the graduates of Notre Dame what I affirm to you as the foundational truth of human existence with which I trust you are leaving this campus.

My academic freedom to declare this truth is the very reason I teach at Point Loma Nazarene University rather than at a state university and why I am committed to the programs of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. It’s also the reason that many of your parents and mentors encouraged you to come here to an academic community that is also a faith community.

It’s not an “easy” truth because it is NOT the world’s truth—it has always been “foolishness” to those who think themselves most wise. It does not produce easy “change” or easy fixes. In fact, this truth will challenge you every day as you try to apply it in your own life and in your world.

If you affirm this truth – or if you are diligently seeking a deeper understanding of its meaning – I invite you to join me now in repeating this most ancient declaration of the Christian faith:

“Jesus is Lord Jesus is Lord Jesus is Lord.”

Let me conclude by offering a blessing for you:

Graduates of 2009, may you find “daily bread” from God’s word for strength and wisdom to practice the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life. May you be granted Holy Spirit discernment to reflect Christ, to share Christ, to enjoy Christ. May you experience fully in the glorious days ahead of you the life that is truly life. God’s grace be with you all. Amen.