

Calvin College Commencement Address 2007
Dr. Michelle Loyd-Paige

Leave A Little Dust

Thank you, President Byker, for your generous introduction. To the board of trustees, the alumni board, members of the faculty and staff, to the reunion class of 1957, to the family members and friends of the graduates, and especially to the class of 2007, I do not have the words that can adequately express what it is like for me to stand here before you as the one who will give the commencement address this day. While I am deeply honored; I am sure that some of you are wondering why her? Well, I'd give you the answer but, I'm still wondering the same thing myself.

But as long as I am here, I want to ask your indulgence as I take moment to give a shout out to Andrew, Nana Yae, Chinyere, Morgan, Lauren, Chris, Abi, John, Colin, Maree and the members of my fall demography class. Thank you for touching my life and giving me some of my best teaching and learning experiences of the past four years.

Now for the real deal ... Class of 2007, this day has been a longtime coming. I estimate that it has taken you at least 140 classroom contact hours, an additional 450 study hours, 132 exams, 120 papers and essays, 120 all-nighters (I am sure that is only a coincident), 300 PowerPoint slides, the fulfillment of your core requirement, you major requirement, interim requirement, CCE requirement, and the dating to engagement requirement just to get to this day. I know that it feels good to be done and that if you never see another bluebook, it will still be too soon! Many of you have your cars packed with your belongings so that as soon as the recession song is played you'll be on US 131 and outta here.

But I am going to invoke professorial privilege and give you one more assignment as you leave Calvin College to begin the next stage of your life and yes you will be tested on this. Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to "*leave a little dust*".

The goal of your assignment is for you to walk through this life leaving some evidence of your passage. Your assignment to *leave a little dust* is about choosing mindfully what you will do with the most precious gift you have ... your time. Time is your most precious gift because you only have

24 hours in a day. You can make more money, but you can not make more time. You may have been able to retake an exam; but you can't retake a day. When you give your time, you are giving a portion of your life that you will never get back. The gift of your time is the gift of your life. So what will you do with your time; what will you do with your life?

Class of 2007, we live in a world that is filled with demands for our time ... there are friendships and family relationships to nurture; homes to make; and our faith to keep. But perhaps the biggest consumer of our time is our work. – with its deadlines, the pressures to do more and to be productive every minute of the day ... and if you can multitask, all the better. In the face of all these demands, balance is needed. If you don't get this part of the *leave a little dust* assignment right, you will realize all too late that maybe some of those Mondays you should have left work at 4:00 in the afternoon instead of 9:00 in the evening and that on some of those Saturdays, instead of cleaning all day, you should have just left the dust and caught some waves and rays at the beach or ran a 5k just for the fun of it. So literally, for the first part of your post-Calvin assignment, I want you to rediscover what “fun” is, what it is like to do “nothing” but hang out with your friends without feeling guilty about it or worrying about how you are going to make up the loss study time. I want you to live a life that is balanced with no regrets.

For the second part of this *leave a little dust* assignment I want you to find a way to use some of your time for the issues of our day that matter to you and that trouble the kingdom of God. You see by definition dust is “Particles of matter that are the result of disintegration of something:”¹ I want you to take what you have learned at Calvin and tear some stuff up, I want you to disintegrate the problems of this world. I want you to take the lessons learned from sociology, biology, philosophy, history, engineering, psychology, nursing, education, Spanish, social work, chemistry, French, computer science, business, economics, religion, art, music; I want you to take your single majors, double and group majors that you have earned and bring about the kind transformation that you want to see in this world. What cries for justice catches your attention? What do you want to see eliminated in your lifetime? Well, take your education and do something about it. And if you don't feel like you have enough education to deal with it ... get some more.

¹Excerpted from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary*. Copyright © 1997 The Learning Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

For me, I am working to disintegrate racism, sexism, and domestic violence. These are the cries for justice that I hear; this is what I believe God has directed me to do. For you, it may be reversing the effects of global warming, it may be stopping the horrors of Darfur, it may be eradicating poverty and providing homes for the homeless, it may be putting the care back into our health care system, or it just may be eliminating institutional racism wherever you find it. Your kingdom work may not look like my kingdom work; but that is the beauty of being a part of the Body of Christ. All of our callings, though different, have a common origin, and are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. We may hear different cries for justice; but the One who calls us to work for justice is the same.

So for this second and final part of your leave a *little dust assignment*, I want you to listen for the cries of justice in this world for they are many and they are getting louder and louder day by day; I want you to find the issue that you want to turn to dust; then I want you to work at it as if you were really trusting God to lead the way; I want you to work at it as if you really believed that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you; I want you to work at it as if you really believed that what you do for Christ will last; and I want you to work at it as if you understood that the issue you are working on has no choice but to disintegrate, no matter what it how long it takes. Then once you begin to see the dust form because of your work, because of your voice, and because of your prayers ... write your name in the dust so people will know that you, a Calvin College graduate, were there and that you cared. Write your name in the dust to challenge others to leave a little dust of their own. I want you to *leave a little dust* ... no leave a dust storm! ... as evidence that you were here and as proof that this world does indeed belong to God.

Class of 2007 as you commence with the next stage of your life journey leave a little dust ... and write your name in it.