



GRADUATION ADDRESS | Friday 30 November 2018

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Faculty, Graduates, family and friends. Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you this evening.

Firstly, Graduates, congratulations! Enjoy this moment and take the accolades of the University, your family and friends as we celebrate the completion of this learning journey. I say completion reservedly, because I hope the journey is far from complete. The real value of what you have just achieved is found in the way that it continues to influence, challenge and drive you forward in the months and years ahead. So, well done - but don't stop learning and applying your knowledge to new contexts of life, mission and ministry. May there be no exams and research essays awaiting your attention - but plenty of reflection, analysis and application just around the corner!

My faith community of origin is The Salvation Army and whilst I am glad that my own theological education and formation has many ecumenical parts (largely influenced by this University as both a graduate and faculty member), I know that there are foundational aspects of Salvationism that are strong aspects of my story. One of those unique idiosyncrasies is that every group of ordination candidates for ministry in The Salvation Army are grouped into a session and given a scripture passage and name as part of their journey. So the beautiful intersection for me tonight is that our scripture here, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, is the passage given to my group those decades ago and we were named as the "Ambassadors for Christ". As v 20 says "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God." I carry several legacies as a result of this title. There are the repressed memories of a terrible song written for us to sing, more like a funeral lament than a song of celebration. I have a medium sized Salvation Army flag worn at my ordination emblazoned with the name "Ambassadors for Christ". Also, I carry a sense of missional identity connected with this scripture and the concept of what it means to be an Ambassador.

Of course, I cannot claim this identity solely to myself. Rather all of us who seek to follow after the way of Christ are Ambassadors. In particular, our graduates here tonight, you are each Christ's ambassadors - seeking to be active in Gods ministry of reconciliation within the world. However, I do wonder about the church in Australia at the moment, a church that we are obviously committed to. Do we behave like ambassadors or more like military commanders issuing a declaration of war, or worse still maneuvering for a last ditch defensive stand? What is our stance and reaction to the world around us: defensiveness, aggressive apologetics, seeking to prove we are right and society is wrong? Graduates, do we approach the



world like we have a battle to wage and a people to conquer or rather with the diplomacy and openness of an ambassador? An ambassador knows to whom they belong and what their ultimate message is. But they are open to new learnings and constructive dialogue, seeking to build relationships and engagement with others rather than building walls and defensive positions.

This ambassadorial task connects me to at least two of the University of Divinity graduate attributes - engage and serve. As graduates of this university you have been challenged to engage with diverse views, contexts and traditions and to be active in the service of others. These attributes represent a positive stance of connection and transformation with wider society, so that the world may encounter the love and grace of God in us and through us.

We live in a world obsessed with walls at the moment. Barriers erected to exclude the other. But ambassadors' cross boundaries. They overcome walls. They include and embrace rather than define who is in and who is out. A good theological education, such as that you have received through the University of Divinity, is not about exclusion but rather engagement and service. Education should never be used by those who have pursued it as a weapon of exclusion, but rather as a tool for the benefit of all so that others can be lifted up and encounter the truth, life and hope that we cherish. We engage. We seek wholeness and life for others through the opportunities and education we have worked hard to obtain. An ambassador reaches out in the name of the one they represent, displaying the beauty and warmth of their kingdom. An ambassador engages and serves. We are each challenged to engage and serve in the name of Christ.

My academic training is that of a missiologist, and whilst I have spent much of my time in recent years as an academic administrator, my real passion is to see people explore the dynamics of what it means to be the people of God in this world and how that transforms who we are, and as a result the people and world around us. Historically the 1960's and 70's saw both the ecumenical and evangelical traditions converge to adopt a largely shared definition of evangelism – one still largely accepted by missiologists today. Let me share it tonight from the Lausanne Covenant of 1974: Evangelism is "The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World." Engage and serve. Not selectively. Not fractionally.

Graduates you are recipients of a gift in the education you have pursued and the awards you have earned. Well done! But now the greater task is to use it. Engage and serve. All of us (the whole church) - taking the fullness of the Gospel story with all its transformative reality and hope filled promise. Engaging through word and deed so that hope is spoken, and hope is enacted wherever we are present as ambassadors for Christ. And this hope is for the whole world. Not only those we have deemed to be within our borders or boundaries. Not simply for those with whom we share a theological perspective. This isn't only for those with whom we find a comfortable cultural heritage. Nor exclusively for those whose sexuality or gender identity seem familiar and acceptable to us. We are ambassadors who share this hope with the whole world. No boundaries, no walls – but rather boundless grace and all-embracing love. Engage and serve. The whole church taking the whole Gospel to the whole world.

I will soon depart my homeland, Australia, to minister with The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom. Part of my responsibility will include Portsmouth on the south coast, the location from which the first fleet of convict ships containing the rejected of English society departed for what we now know as Australia. Poetic justice perhaps. This Australian shipped back to Portsmouth to lead The Salvation Army in Hampshire, Dorset and the surrounding areas. Amongst my ambassadorial tasks for Australia I could consider transmitting the finer points of Australian culture and cuisine, which is a task that may not take too long! AFL watching, vegemite sandwich eating, whilst we await the latest unscheduled change of Prime Minister.



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Maybe I can introduce the high point of our electoral system, that being the pursuit of the democracy sausage on election day. But with Brexit looming they may have to be English pork and not German bratwurst.

My ambassadorial tasks for the descendants of convicts may not be my major focus. However, I remain Christ's ambassador and that sense of identity will influence my mission and ministry. Engage and serve – the boundless grace of God and the all-embracing love of God through me and in me. Graduates, as you embark upon the next step in your walk of faith may the privilege of all you have learnt and encountered inspire you to seek life and hope for the communities around you.

As 2 Corinthians 5:20 reminds us “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God.”

Go well – and may people know they have encountered the presence of the kingdom of God through the way you engage and serve those around you.

Major Gregory Morgan
University of Divinity
November 2018

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Major Gregory Morgan, Recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, 2018

The Chancellor of the University of Divinity, Dr Graeme L Blackman AO, awarded the University’s Distinguished Service Medal to Major Gregory Morgan at a graduation ceremony held on Friday 30 November 2018 at Immanuel College Chapel, in Novar Gardens, Adelaide. The award is made in recognition of Major Morgan’s distinguished service to the University of Divinity as a leader, missiologist, author and teacher.

In presenting the award, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Sherlock, praised Major Morgan’s service to the University represented in the creation of Eva Burrows College as the National College for the Salvation Army in Australia within the University of Divinity.

The citation for his award reads:

Major Gregory Morgan has rendered distinguished service to the University of Divinity as a leader, missiologist, author and teacher. He was instrumental in establishing the original collegiate relationship between the Salvation Army and the University of Divinity. He served as the National Training Principal and Head of Eva Burrows College, the Salvation Army’s National College and as such provided a valuable contribution to the University Executive. Major Morgan provided significant leadership in the coming together of Booth College and Catherine Booth College to form a new National education and training service for The Salvation Army in Australia and the subsequent collegiate relationship of Eva Burrows College with the University. His legacy is evident in the continuing strong relationship between the University, Eva Burrows College and the Salvation Army.



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