

FIVE AND FIVE

Commencement Address
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at Neumann College
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The spirit of voluntarism is stirring again in America; so is the spirit of generosity. They ebb and flow, rise and fall throughout our national history. Today both are on the rise in a new and challenging form.

Under the title "Daring Goals for a Caring Society," a Washington-based, private organization called "Independent Sector" is urging citizens of the United States to commit themselves to a clear and measurable goal of giving and volunteering. Give five percent of your income; volunteer five hours of your time each week. Become a "fiver!" People who give five percent or more of their income to charity and five or more hours a week to voluntary service are models for a caring society in the Independent Sector's blueprint for a better world.

It is natural on Graduation Day to experience a sense of gratitude. Graduates are naturally grateful to parents, spouses, faculty, and friends, who have helped them along the way to their degrees.

Gratitude to God, the giver of all talent, is only right and just on Graduation Day. But Graduation Day is also Commencement Day, and what should commence today in each of your lives is a lifelong expression of gratitude for all gifts and opportunities received. Consider yourselves "much obliged" to give, to share.

No one of you, I suspect, has plans of becoming another Albert Einstein. But every one of you can make your own Einstein's insight which he expressed in the following words: "A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving."

Think of what a wonderful world it would be if all who take diplomas all across this country this year would also take upon themselves the obligation to give back to society five percent of income and five of the 168 hours which are theirs every week. Five and five--a formula for a caring society! It cannot be legislated. It will never be coerced. It can only begin in freedom. It will never begin unless you permit it, and unless you are willing to pay up personally--five and five.

An estimated 20 million people are five percent givers in the United States today. Twenty-three million people volunteer their services at least five hours each week. They do so without dislocating their lives. They remain committed to jobs, professions, and other persons. They meet family responsibilities;

they have time for themselves. But they do more. They stretch themselves to five and five, and in so doing they know a fuller measure of personal happiness and provide a fuller life for others. They discover the meaning and the mystery of the scriptural wisdom that it is in giving that we receive. This ancient lesson is all too frequently lost on busy people preoccupied with self-fulfillment and puzzled by their inability to find personal happiness.

You have all heard of "tithing." Perhaps the biblical target of tithing was too high, or at least has become too high for our times. Ten percent of income never caught on as a goal for charitable giving in contemporary society. Perhaps "fiving"--the recently articulated goal for the fivers--will become a creative rediscovery of what it means to tithe. Five and five do, of course, make ten. In the apples-and-oranges addition of five percent and five hours, we may rediscover in our day the spirit of the tithe. Try it--for your own happiness and for the benefit of the society into which you walk with your new degree today.

Just as there has been an ebb and flow in the spirit of voluntarism in America, there has also been an emergence and reemergence, over the past few decades, of the idea of national service. In the Congress of the United States this year, Senator Sam Nunn and Representative Dave McCurdy have a not-very-popular bill which would replace Pell grants with national service vouchers and make eligibility for student loans contingent on

full-time military or civilian service. In other words, national service first, Federal student aid later; all other Federal student aid programs would disappear in the Nunn-McCurdy scenario.

Senator Edward Kennedy's "Serve America" bill calls for grants to states that would create or expand paid service (low pay, of course, but paid service opportunities nonetheless) for students and out-of-school youth, from kindergarten through college. Existing student aid programs would remain in place.

Senator Christopher Dodd and Representative Leon Panetta want to establish an American Conservation and Youth Service Corps, providing full-time service opportunities in the conservation area with a financial benefit of up to 110 percent of the minimum wage.

Other bills, introduced by Senators Dale Bumpers, Barbara Mikulski, and Claiborne Pell, would fund demonstration projects fostering community service and providing, at the end, financial benefits which could become aid to college students.

The volunteer spirit has been leading students to the Peace Corps since the early 1960s. That road is still open. Join the Peace Corps and you can, as you know, have portions of your student loans forgiven. But there simply is not enough room in the Peace Corps for all those who want to volunteer, because the total budget of the Peace Corps is an amount equal to just one-half the cost of a single B-1 bomber.

Presidential candidate George Bush announced in the fall of 1989 a program called Youth Entering Service to America (YES to America) which President George Bush has not yet moved forward. When he does put it on the tracks, President Bush hopes to attract some private-sector funding, but promises to apply only a few Federal dollars to organize this program of volunteer service, and no Federal dollars to reward the volunteers. Let volunteer service be its own reward, says Mr. Bush, while going on to say, "I am speaking of a new engagement in the lives of others--a new activism, hands-on and involved, that gets the job done. We must bring in the generations, harnessing the unused talent of the elderly and the unfocused energy of the young. For not only leadership is passed from generation to generation, so is stewardship."

A strong sense of stewardship should be yours wherever you go, whatever you do, and regardless of whether you are working for pay or contributing services as an unpaid volunteer. The five-and-five philosophy is a splendid expression of stewardship.

That concept--the notion or idea of stewardship--is not a new one. It is, in fact, ancient. It is biblical, even pre-biblical. The fundamental idea of stewardship is simply this: wealth possessed is held in trust; you own nothing absolutely. God is the owner; you are the manager. You have what you have--your talents, your material possessions--not to do with as you please, but to use for God's glory and the service of others. It is all summed up nicely for you in the first verse of

the 24th Psalm: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." God has the ownership; you have the use. And that applies to your time and talent as well as to your turf and your treasure. Too few of us regard ourselves as stewards of wealth and income, of money and time, seriously obliged to use them for the good of others. In consequence of our failure in this regard, too few of us are willing to pay up so that many of our society's problems can be put down. If Pogo was perceptive in saying to Porky that we are "at the crossroads of the past, present, and future," his comic-strip companion was even more perceptive and refreshingly practical when he replied, "Where's the toll booth?"

Part of the toll you should be willing to pay, since you will always be standing at the crossroads of the future, is "five and five." All of you are stewards, not owners. You have a stewardship responsibility over your time, your talent, and whatever wealth and income which may come your way. Use your wealth with the good of others in mind. That is responsible stewardship. Give back to the community five percent of your income. Pay back--as an expression of your own gratitude, and as an exercise of your stewardship responsibilities--five hours a week in volunteer service. This is practical stewardship. It can begin right now. You don't have to wait for President Bush, or for the promptings of a Federal program. It would be good, of course, for you to do whatever you can to bring about public policies which would put more Federal financial aid at the

disposal of another generation of students who hope to earn the same degree your diploma delivers to you today. But your own student-aid need is not and, in most cases, cannot now be tied to volunteer service. As far as you are concerned, that link is not now broken; it was just never forged. In any case, you now have your degrees. You also have the opportunity to give back freely of your time and your treasure--five and five.

Let me end with a story. Everything I've tried to convey to you in this commencement address is offered with the hope, indeed the prayer, that it will help you find a deeper meaning in your lives and enjoy a fuller measure of personal happiness.

The story focuses on a man who was rich and unhappy. It is called "The Window and the Looking Glass" and it is taken from rabbinical literature dating back to the beginning of the eighteenth century, to the Hassadim, pious Jews who lived in the ghettos of Poland.

A man whose heart was hardened by wealth went to the Rabbi Eisig. The rabbi said to him: 'Look out the window, and tell me what you see in the street'. 'I see people walking up and down'. Then he gave him a looking glass: 'Look in this and tell me what you see'. The man replied: 'I see myself'. 'So you don't see the others any more? Consider that the window and the mirror are both made of glass; but, since the mirror has a coating of silver, you only see yourself in it, while you can see others through the transparent glass of the window. I am very sorry to have to compare you to these two kinds of glass. When you were poor, you saw others and had compassion on them; but, being covered with wealth, you see only yourself. It would be much the best

thing for you to scrape off the silver coating so that you could once again see other people'.

Well, my friends, permit me to suggest on your great Graduation Day that "it would be much the best thing to you" too, in the years ahead, to "scrape off" five percent of your income each year and give it to charity. And with the freedom and clearer vision you thus obtain, commit yourselves to five hours of volunteer service every week, "so that you [can really] see other people." See them not as persons who can do something for you, but as persons whose lives will be enriched if you take time to care.

Five and five--"daring goals for a caring society." Regard the diploma you receive today as a ticket to the pursuit of those goals. You'll find happiness, if you do. And you will give Neumann College good reason always to be proud of the hand it had in sending you on your way.