



**Milligan's Class of 2003 was a group of academically talented students. Thirty-four percent graduated with honors, and every bit of it was earned, say faculty.**

# GO AND LEAD

**Academic Dean Mark Matson shares message and charge of servant-leadership**

*—Adapted from message presented at MSOT pinning ceremony*

**I**t is not enough to pat you on the back, though you richly deserve it. It is not enough to send you out now into the world to prove your worth in practical situations, though we have no doubt you will indeed prove yourself to be well trained and successful. Instead I would like to take one more time to remind you of the highest ideals that I hope, and trust, you will aim for in your work — both now and throughout your career. I want to challenge you to not only be a professional, but to be a servant leader.

This concept of servant leadership is one that we speak a lot about at Milligan these days. This has always been one of the basic missions at Milligan: to train individuals to become Christian leaders. But what exactly is servant-leadership? Does it mean that those with the natural gifts of leadership should show humility? Yes, but it's more. Does it mean that those who serve will be leaders? Perhaps, but not always, or at least not leaders in the way we often think of them — wielding power from positions of authority.

What is servant-leadership? In the gospel of John, Jesus facing his coming death at the final meal demonstrates his core desire for his disciples by taking a basin and towel and washing his disciples' feet — less than honorable, undoubtedly dirty, and perhaps sore. Jesus stooped down both literally and symbolically, he humbled himself and took the role of a servant.

And Jesus said to the disciples: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than one who sent them."

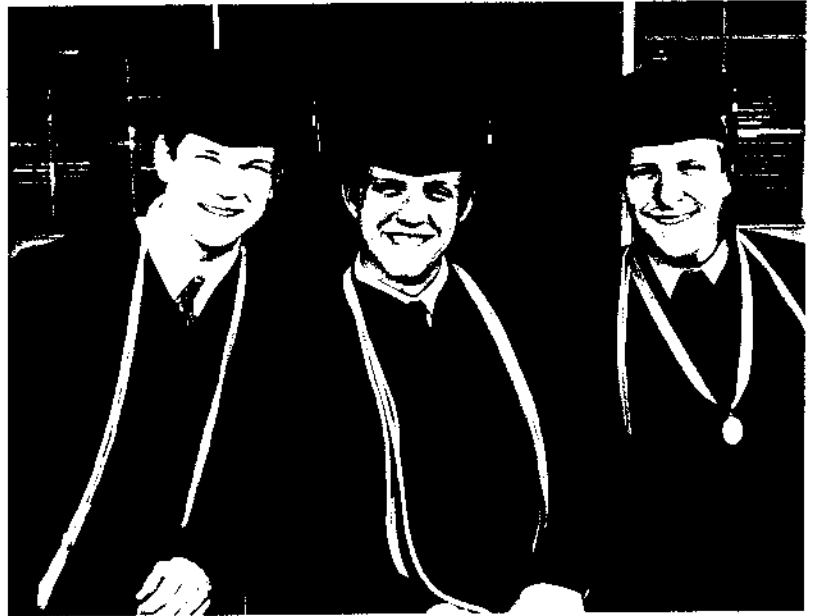
A servant leader, then, is one who follows Jesus' lead — to show that true leadership begins on the knee. But Jesus also showed a strength of character, a resolve, a willingness to resist the cultural expectations. And in doing so he was also leading. I maintain that the servant will lead, though not always from positions of prestige. The servant will lead by example. And *that*, ultimately, is what servant leadership is all about. When a servant-leader assumes a position of prestige and authority, then his or her moral authority is amplified all the more by the previous examples of servanthood.

Because this passage from the Gospel of John so clearly demonstrates the concept of servant leadership, we have adopted the basin and towel as key symbols for our college — a basin and towel precede the faculty in our formal assemblies, such as commencement service.

It is all well and good to encourage you to go out and serve



Above, Academic Dean Mark Matson (left) and President Don Jeanes (right) present commencement speaker Ziden Nutt, founder and executive director of Good News Productions International, with an honorary "Doctor of Letters" degree. At right, graduates Dan Clemens, David Harris and Tony Jones prepare for commencement.



and show the world the power of the risen Lord. It is all well and good to send you out with the high idealism of your profession and the gospel of Jesus. But service is hard and lonely work. Sometimes those you serve won't be nice, won't thank you. Sometimes those you serve will be critical. Sometimes the days will be long. Sometimes you will wish to have your ego stroked, your pocketbook fatter, and your life easier.

So perhaps you need more than idealism, but also some practical advice on how to sustain your own strength and purpose in your service. How do you keep on serving, how do you keep your spirit, when the times are difficult? Let me suggest three ways to help you keep your life focused on serving, and thus ways to demonstrate your true leadership in this life:

**Savor the service, don't relish just the result**

Our work lives are often very goal-oriented. You have just been through a perfect example of that: you have worked for several years to achieve the result of completing your program of schooling. In your jobs you will often have short and long term goals. The real success of servant leaders is in a mindset of involvement that takes joy in the journey, not just in the result. This involvement is captured by Mary Oliver:

*When it's over, I don't want to wonder  
if I have made my life something particular, and real.  
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,  
or full of argument.  
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.*

Involvement is matter of perspective. To be truly involved is to be enthusiastic about the process of living and serving, with people and for people. Paul Rogat Loeb in *Soul of a Citizen* puts this attitude of involvement this way: "The main distinction between those who participate fully in communities and those who withdraw into private life doesn't rest in the active citizens' grasp of complex issues, or their innate moral strength.

Instead, those who get involved view their place in the world very differently. They have learned specific lessons about approaching social change: that they don't need to wait for perfect circumstances, the perfect cause, or the perfect level of knowledge to take a stand; that they can proceed step by step, so that they don't get overwhelmed before they start. They savor the journey of engagement and draw strength from its challenges. Taking the long view, they come to trust that the fruits of their efforts will ripple outward, in ways they can rarely anticipate."

Perhaps the best example of this was Mother Theresa. Upon being asked how she could continue to treat people who were desperately ill, she said that it was simple. She simply viewed each person she treated as Jesus Christ, and then anything she did, from cleaning maggots from wounds to washing up feces, was an act of worship and adoration. This is truly savoring the journey of engagement. And so take Mother Theresa as an example: Savor the service — experience by experience, person by person — rather than valuing only the results of your work.

**Celebrate Community**

Secondly, find ways to express your lives and your service within communities that can support you. Rebecca Hughes was two months pregnant and unsure how to continue working and mothering her child. But a casual question to a neighbor in her apartment building changed her life and that of others. She simply asked her neighbor if she would like to exchange baby-sitting. This led to the creation of a co-op for working mothers and grew even beyond that to a vital community that functioned as an extended family: exchanging baby-sitting, holding a weekly play group, sharing emotional support, volunteering at a community help line, and exchanging hints on how to raise their children and stay healthy. This co-op allowed more women to

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BY *servicing*

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continue to work and to serve, and the results trickled out into the larger community of Boston.

Rebecca's response to this was interesting. She said that this group involvement "just seemed like a more hopeful way to live." What Rebecca had discovered was the power of communities in helping unleash opportunities for service and sharing. We simply cannot live our lives effectively if we are alone, cut off from the support of others. For you to be effective, for you to be sustained for a lifetime of service, you will need to plug into the power of communities that can support you and to which you can pour your own knowledge and strength.

The church, of course, is the best example of this kind of community, and I hope you are all finding just what kind of a vital support that can be. But wherever you are, find or create a community that can both be bigger than you, and on which you can draw when your lives get tough. From personal experience, when my wife and I lost our oldest child in a car accident, the community that we belonged to — our church — provided the absolute essential support we need for tough times. You will face tough times. I hope you won't try to weather them alone. Celebrate community — for your own needs and for the larger needs of our world.

**Prevent the Paralysis of Perfection**

Finally, don't try to be perfect or solve all the problems you will confront. This can be paralyzing and defeating. In the 1960s, the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott developed the now-accepted concept of the "good-enough mother." Winnicott argued that the goal of errorless child-rearing is a destructive and impossible standard that produces guilt and recrimination. As Jon and Myla

Kabat-Zinn explain in their parenting study, *Everyday Blessings*, "there is no question about doing a perfect job, or 'always getting it right.' 'Perfect' is simply not relevant, whatever that would mean...What is important is that we be authentic, and that we honor our children and ourselves as best we can." In this vein, maybe we should aspire to become "good-enough servants," realizing that although we may never win the Nobel Peace Prize, our contribution can still make a difference. In *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean stressed the same point: "Better to help ten real hurting people — or nine, or one," she concluded, "than to be overwhelmed and withdraw and do nothing."

You will be faced with real human problems. Some will overwhelm you. Some will discourage you. But you aren't called upon to solve all the problems — just try to do your best given your limitations of time and emotional energy. *Don't let perfection paralyze you into inaction.*

**A High Calling**

You have chosen a high calling, the calling of service. We at Milligan College are proud of you. And we are confident that as you serve humanity person by person you will indeed make the world a better place and reflect the love of Jesus. By staying involved, being part of a community, and focusing on what we can do one person at a time, you will be leaders, servant-leaders.

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Graduate  
 leaves words  
 of wisdom  
 for students

by Jennifer Soucie (OX)

# It's all about relationships

As I graduate, I still don't have a clear vision of what God has in store for my life. But I've recently learned that being uncertain about the future is okay. Trusting God fully for direction is the key. Whenever I panic about my lack of definite plans, then turn to rely on God once again. He places opportunities in my lap that remind me that He is taking care of me in His own timing.

Just this week, I was reminded of the words in James 4:14-15. "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

God has exciting things in store for our lives! Take the plunge and you will

grow immensely from the experience. Continue your progression towards a diploma and imagine the possibilities that God is handing you.

Whether you have three years until graduation or you are counting down the hours, take not just a moment, but time each day to appreciate all that Milligan has to offer. So often, I fail to slow down from my frantic pace and