

Spring Commencement 2008
Remarks by President Warren J. Baker
June 14 and 15, 2008

During your years here, the University has tried to assist you in finding some of the means that you will need to achieve success and fulfillment in your lives. But what's past is prologue. One door is quietly closing today while another is opening into a larger world in which each of you must discover your own way. This discovery, however, cannot be passive.

People just don't find themselves. They must create themselves through their actions. Men and women can achieve personal identities only by making decisions that require foresight and, at times, great courage. You will be challenged to stretch your imagination, to test your will and to make choices and weigh the consequences for yourselves and for others.

The challenges are certainly daunting. At the top of the list is the challenge to protect our environment and create a sustainable world that will enable nations and people to live peacefully and productively.

To arrive at the choices you will have to make I urge you first to seek the truth. To do otherwise might mean that you become enslaved to a falsehood. And those who

know the least are willing to accept shallow and popular falsehoods the most readily. Don't join that crowd.

Be guided by truth, not by what is only convenient or what happens to be fashionable. The truth will really free you to create your own unique identity. Be sure that you continue to explore the world of ideas. Be curious. Most of all, continue to learn.

Your education does not come to an end with this ceremony today. In many important ways, it's just begun. I urge you also to continue to seek greater meaning in your life. This may require an act of faith when faced with much of the chaos, complexity, even the insane brutality that exists in many parts of the world and in our own society. I advise you, though, to always keep close to your family and friends, to venerate your religion, to find solace in nature, the arts and your culture. Take time to smell the flowers and cultivate your friendships.

As you step forward to a new world of opportunity, I also urge you to heed the words of Mahatma Gandhi. He described the seven deadly sins, warning us about science without humanity, politics without principles, knowledge without character, wealth without work, commerce without morality, pleasure without

conscience and worship without sacrifice. Your spirit will always require nourishment. See to it that you attend to your spirit or it will shrivel and die.

I urge you to strive, as well, to make sure justice informs all of human affairs.

Practice charity and forbearance in your daily life, and know that you and I, all the people around us, everyone we meet every day, share a common humanity.

Your responsibilities to your community and to your fellow human beings extend well beyond your narrow self-interests. You have benefited from a wonderful education provided for you by the citizens of this state and with this privilege comes responsibilities to work to improve our society, to protect our environment and extend this privilege to the generations who will follow you.

I urge you also to understand the dignity of human aspirations. The ability to hope and the ability to dream of a brighter future show us what it is to be human. We cherish this quality in ourselves. You must see to it, then, that the dreams of others are not destroyed by prejudice, by discrimination, by poverty or by ignorance.

So to this Class of 2008: there is a world of challenge before you. And a world of opportunity awaits you. And it is likely that you will be tested and tested severely.

But I believe that you will be up to the test when you make your decisions --
always -- on the side of truth and virtue.

I hope as you leave the campus today you will express your appreciation for the
faculty who have taught you. You have had the benefit of what I believe to be the
best and most dedicated faculty in the country. They are not only interested in
what you are learning, they are also interested in the kind of person you are
becoming. Stay in touch with them.

I hope that you'll remember Cal Poly in the years ahead. That you will become a
part of this growing family in our Alumni Association and that you will stay in
touch and come back often. We'll keep the porch light on just for you. Class of
2008, congratulations, best wishes, and God speed to each of you.