



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

"Seek 'A Closer Walk with Thee'"
Paul Nii-Ankamah Addo II '15
GCU Graduate Commencement Remarks
May 19, 2016

Mr. John Lloyd, Sister Rose Martin, members of the Board of Trustees, President Marbach, Provost Behre, honored guests, administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, family, friends, and my fellow graduates, Good Evening.

It is my distinct honor to welcome you to the Graduate Commencement Ceremonies for the Georgian Court University graduate Class of 2016. For the graduates, it is my fervent hope that your time here at GCU has been an educational and life-changing experience for you. The sacrifices you have made, including time away from family, friends, and even work are all worth the effort. Whether the graduate program that you completed was from the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Education, or the School of Business and Digital Media, I strongly believe that each and every one of the students here today has an individual inspirational story, a desire, ambition, or a dream that propelled him or her to pursue and to accomplish the goal of a graduate degree. For following through and making this dream of yours become a reality, I say to all of you, a job well done, CONGRATULATIONS.

Prior to starting my graduate studies here at GCU, I had often thought of pursuing theological studies. Having completed my undergraduate studies several years earlier, it was just a dream. But when I came across an announcement in our parish bulletin on the Graduate Information Session about the graduate programs here at GCU, I had my light bulb moment, so to speak.

As a result of my studies here, I came to realize something that had never entered into my consciousness, but which I felt should have been obvious all along. It is this: I as an individual, and we collectively as created beings, cannot affect or change the nature of God by any action or inaction on our part. The nature or essence of God is love. Therefore, when we seek "A Closer Walk with Thee," as the hymn goes; that is, a personal and intimate relationship with God through Christ, we become benefactors of God's grace. God "rewards those who (diligently) seek Him" (NRSV, Hebrews 11:6). But first we must have faith in God, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (NRSV, Hebrews 11:6). We should all strive for a life of holiness; holiness being defined as a "transformed life tuned to doing the will of God."

Georgian Court University has provided all of the graduates here today great educational and life experiences that will impact us for the rest of our lives, not only individually, but very likely will impact others with whom we come in contact. When you think about this, this is profound. Following in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, GCU has today secured and continue to maintain its place as a "beacon of ethical education and academic excellence."

As GCU graduates, we must always bear in mind the core values of this Sisters of Mercy institution, which are respect, integrity, justice, compassion, and service. Graduates, as parents and guardians (*or as we step into these roles in the future*), as educational and religious leaders, scientists and artists, psychologists, holistic health providers, businessmen and women (*to mention only a few of the various studies the graduates here today have completed*): Let us all enjoy our graduate professions; we worked so hard for it. But we should always continue to hold ourselves to the high moral and ethical standards instilled in us by this institution and by our parents and guardians in earlier years. Examples of these standards are the Sisters of Mercy core values I mentioned earlier and in the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Hold on steadfast to these ideals, and pass them on to the next generation. This is essential because we do not want to be "tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (NRSV, Ephesians 4:14) that comes along or in fashion today.

There are many religious faiths, including several Christian denominations, here at GCU. This is a testament to GCU as a religious institution. I urge my fellow graduates to continue to be involved in their religious faith. If anyone happens to be on the sidelines at the moment, it is worth reconsidering your position. But remember, whatever your religious tradition, a "relationship with our Creator is a universal possibility." If we open our hearts, we are all capable of finding God in all things, in all

persons, and we are all capable of the highest human aspirations and social change. In light of this, I ask that all activities, especially faith-based ones that bring positive change to those who are less fortunate than us, here at home and around the world, should be foremost in our thoughts.

To summarize, the three things I leave you to ponder on are:

1. Let us draw ourselves closer to our Creator and honor Him with a life guided by faith.
2. Be ethical and be guided by a good moral compass in our graduate professions.
3. "Let our attitudes and actions be shaped by commitments beyond ourselves."

The hope is that we graduates here today will do our very best to use the knowledge and skills acquired from our education and from our life experiences to make this world a better place.

My fellow graduates, go forth with the Light of Mercy as a visible sign that a Georgian Court education makes a difference for us in our academic attainment but more so in how in our lives are directed.

Thank you, and Congratulations.