

Fr. Joseph Simmons, SJ  
Alpha Sigma Nu remarks  
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Marquette University

Good morning, everyone. We've heard from our executive board about the values of Alpha Sigma Nu: scholarship, loyalty, and service. I won't revisit familiar ground. What I wish to offer, briefly, is what a Jesuit like me hopes for each of you as members of Alpha Sigma Nu. To begin with, an embarrassing admission: I did not take advantage of Alpha Sigma Nu opportunity when I was in undergraduate at Marquette. With a number of honors societies and awards on offer at the end of four years, I thought Alpha Sigma Nu was just one more feather in the cap before graduation. I thought it was just sprinkling some more Jesuit language on my already wonderful life. But now I see there can be a big difference, if we are intentional. So what is the value-add of this Jesuit Honors Society?

You are a smart bunch, so allow me to travel a little further upstream from the ideals we've heard so far today. Allow me to suggest that Jesuit education is not *merely* about **scholarship**. Every university worth its salt asks for careful scholarship from its faculty and students. And every academic institution, after its graduates move on, relies on the loyalty of its alumni – especially the advancement office. We are seeing the great loyalty of Marquette's alumni fans coming out to support our basketball team at this very moment. **Loyalty** is good, when it's loyalty to the proper things. So that leaves us with **service**. Surely service is a distinctive measure of a Jesuit education, yes? It absolutely is, but allow me to suggest that you will find no university in the United States that is opposed to community service, or trying to make the world a better place. Perhaps it is a mark of the power of Jesuit education that these ideals have become so pervasive, even in non-Jesuit universities!

But what I think underlies all of these elements is that we Jesuits, at a Catholic University like Marquette, hope to offer a vision for humanity,

grounded in a living relationship with God, that helps you navigate life in a complex world.

You may have heard of the 17<sup>th</sup> century French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal. Pascal would be spinning in his grave knowing that I am quoting him, since he was *not a fan* of us Jesuits! But Pascal offered a helpful consideration of the great religious traditions. He noted that a great religion, if it is worthy of your time, “would have to account for both the greatness and misery that humans are capable of achieving. A true religion must inspire both self-esteem and self-denial, both love and hate.” Hate? Why hate? Let us start with the love: our world is marked by great beauty and opportunities -- cherishing what is good is crucial. But we live in a complex world marked by social strife and visible inequalities, by sin and suffering. If we don't actively confront what is wrong, it doesn't go away. Ignoring what is bad does not make them problems go away, but gives them more power in our imagination, leading people to become anxious and depressed, cynical and hopeless.

We Jesuits hope that someone educated at a Catholic university will have cultivated sufficient spiritual depth, drawing upon your own religious tradition, that you can love God, and your neighbor as yourself, as Christ called us to. We Jesuits hope that you will commit to pursuing what is true and good, without giving into cynical detachment, or despair. Each of us is capable of doing small acts of harm, by our words, actions, or omissions; but we are *equally capable of small acts of goodness and truth, sacrifice and generosity*. These are especially important when no one is watching, and there are no awards or recognition attached.

These are some of the lessons I've learned in my 18 years as a Jesuit so far, lessons I hope you have gotten a taste of in your time as an undergraduate here.

Today, as we go forward, I encourage you to consider whether you feel spiritually equipped to navigate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in our world beyond this campus. If you're not there yet, don't despair! Might I suggest getting involved with campus ministry's many opportunities for direct community service to those in need around Milwaukee? Have you taken advantage of Marquette's great off-campus retreats? Have you taken advantage of Masses or the religious services in your own tradition?

But also, I ask you to recognize where you have *already been* equipped intellectually, humanly, and spiritually, to recognize the great goodness and hope for the world. Equipped with this Catholic, Jesuit vision of hope, how are you specifically called to respond to a world in need of *your* time, *your* talents, and *your* dedication? For at the end of the day, ***Jesuit education is about scholarship, loyalty, and service.*** But it is grounded first in our Catholic, Jesuit imagination that trains our attention and talents not only for my own good, but for the good of my neighbor, and for the world – and all done for the greater honor and glory of God. Congratulations fellow inductees, and welcome to the vision of Alpha Sigma Nu, the Jesuit Honors Society!