

Dr. Allan Ronald
University of Winnipeg Honorary Doctor of Science
Address to the 2006 Graduating Class
Spring Convocation, June 4, 2006

Good morning Doctor Axworthy, Distinguished Guests, Graduates, Families, Colleagues, Friends:

The University of Winnipeg and all of you here have given me an incredible honor today and I'm delighted to accept it.

It is exactly 45 years ago this week that I sat in your seat as a new University graduate. Where did I fit into the complex world of 1961 with its uncertain nuclear shadowed future? Where would I find fulfillment and make my contribution? Perhaps some of these same questions are on your minds today as you reach this seminal intersection on life's journey.

T.S. Elliott and his poetry were part of my English course at the United College in 1955-1956 where I learned from Professor Swayze to appreciate Elliott, perhaps the greatest poet of the last century. His epic poem, *Wasteland*, describes a hopeless, chaotic, arid world in which he found himself without community, without appreciation, without understanding. But a few years later he had been transformed and *Ash Wednesday* the wasteland has become a rose garden and his poetic prayer has the theme 'Teach Us To Care'. I hope that in addition to everything else you have learned at this great University that you have learned to care as you have modelled your life from your teachers and peers and as you have acquired the skills and knowledge that are going to make you fulfilled in the world that you will lead in the decades ahead.

"TEACH ME TO CARE" - we reside in a world where caring has deteriorated. Too many of us find ourselves abused, organized, condescended to, ripped off, even perhaps especially, by my profession of Medicine. People who need care are often vulnerable, lonely, and even pathetic. Caring is not pity or do-goodism, but rather being a compassionate companion towards a person with a need.

On the day Dr. Axworthy called me to inform me about this occasion, I was in Kampala, Uganda and had spent a considerable part of the day with a patient, Fred. He has given me permission to share his story and use it as an illustration of our need to join T.S. Elliott in asking 'Teach me to care'.

I first met Fred five years ago when he and his wife came to our HIV Clinic to learn more about his illness and seek help. He is one of over 40 million people in the world today who have to deal with AIDS on a personal basis. Fred's wife and the youngest of his four teenaged children were also infected with HIV.

Fred is a wonderful batik artist but he came to us primarily because he saw a potential source of care for his illness. However, as an artist, he wanted to receive recognition for his unique skills and he needed a market for his batiks. As a father, he was intent on ensuring that his four children received an excellent education and would have the opportunity to achieve their potential as individuals with something to offer our world. Fred and his journey over the past several years illustrates a number of ways of caring, many of which may not be evident at first glance.

Your President, Dr. Axworthy, has worked tirelessly as Canada's foreign minister and in other capacities to improve life for Ugandans and others around the world by improving the politics and government of countries like Uganda. Fred, like all of us, needs government that have integrity, tax fairly and honestly and redistribute wealth and provide a safety net, regulate when necessary, provide security and ensure justice and allow themselves to be tossed out when they have failed to serve the society. Over two billion people exist today in countries where governments fail to provide minimal standards. One of your professors, Dr. Tom Carter, is currently involved in understanding the complexities of urban government in the City of Kampala, and seeking ways in which our city and country could partner with Kampala and increase their capacity for caring, creating a social net and supporting some of the 90,000 HIV orphans who reside in Kampala. Some of you will be

the Lloyd Axworthys and Tom Carters of the future and give leadership to create a caring society. All of us need it, but particularly individuals in this world who are poor or sick.

Fred also needed access to individuals who would appreciate his art, recognize his unique contribution, and purchase it in order for him to have income. A number of individuals, including my wife Myrna, have taken this on over the last four years. Fred has been able to sell about \$30,000 of his batiks to a widening audience who value his expertise. Many people are now enjoying his art on their walls and he has had the necessary funds to pay for his children's education and have the joy of seeing them succeed, just as many of the parents and families here today are enjoying your success.

Individuals all over the world need trade and access to markets and fair prices - another way to care.

Fred, his wife, and daughter also needed good health care. We with others have been fortunate to have the resources to offer them and approximately 90,000 other Ugandans through training Ugandans to provide the care and ensuring that drugs were available. Unfortunately his wife's illness was far advanced and she died within the first year, but Fred and his daughter have done well until very recently. Tragically Fred developed, in the last few months, a heart problem which may or may not be related to his HIV infection and he is now very ill. Perhaps we will now have the opportunity to reach out to his four children and assist in providing some ongoing

care and support as they complete their education and launch their own careers.

Fred's children need good teachers. Not only individuals who were willing to communicate information but individuals who really cared for them, saw their potential, and ensured that they obtained the very best education possible. Teachers who love their students, and become part of their development have perhaps the most important role in our world today. Unfortunately in many resource-limited countries, even good teachers are overwhelmed by huge class sizes. I was in a town recently where a teacher told me she had over 300 students in her class. Education, as Stephen Lewis has so well articulated, is the quickest way to get out of poverty. Teachers enable this to occur. As a graduating class of educational experts, I want you to care for your students, to be role models, and to genuinely communicate to them your love for them. This is critical to Elliott's caring philosophy in our world today.

Many of you are also graduating from Science and a variety of options exist for you as you move into positions that use your knowledge where you will go on to post-graduate work and develop the expertise to be independent scientists. My friend Fred needs individuals who pursue new knowledge. We must find a way to cure HIV and eradicate this virus. We also desperately need a vaccine. Only with science and the technology that results from science can we ultimately conquer this disease and many others that plague humankind and lead to poverty.

The challenge for each of us today is to take what we have been given with our genes, our environment, the nurturing that we have received, the opportunity to live in a wonderful country like Canada, and to add to it our own potential as individuals so that we offer to our generation and the generations that follow, something more - something worthwhile.

You may not feel that life has dealt you everything that you would have wished, but it is now up to you to build on what you have been given. However, even though you are a product of your past, you do not need to be a prisoner of your past. You have been given so much more than most individuals in the world with **affluence** that puts you in the top 1% of the world in terms of economic opportunities, with **influence**, again one of the top 1% as a Canadian university graduate, and the potential to make a difference as someone who has acquired skills and knowledge at the University of Winnipeg.

As you celebrate this day and the significance of it, I want each of you to consider, regardless of your faith, pray along with Elliott, TEACH ME TO CARE. By being a caring person, we will build into the lives of others and find wonderful rewards for ourselves as we move on to be fulfilled and fulfill our mission in life.

Thank you again for this wonderful day and the honor that you have bestowed upon me.