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The Seeking and Knowing of Truth

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Pollard, C. William, "The Seeking and Knowing of Truth" (2008). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 35.
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**AURORA UNIVERSITY GRADUATION
AURORA IL
May 4, 2008**

“The Seeking and Knowing of Truth”

C. William Pollard

Congratulations, Graduates. This is a day to celebrate your accomplishments. You have set a goal and you have achieved it. It is also a time to recognize and be thankful for those who helped you along the way: your dedicated and committed professors, and your family and friends, they have been there to offer encouragement and support.

But this is a day that also represents a commencement. Your time of learning and study has prepared you for those new opportunities that will be part of your future journey of life.

As I say this, I realize that there is more than a generation of time that separates your life from mine. And I know that life is often better understood looking backward than looking forward. The future has its uncertainties. There will be some curves in the road, and some detours that may slow your journey or present the risk of taking a wrong turn.

There are principles of life, however, that can serve as guideposts as you proceed on this journey.

Etched in stone on the floor of the Chapel of Christ Church College at Oxford University are the words of John Locke spoken over three hundred years ago when he said, "I know there is truth opposite falsehood and that it may be found if people will search for it, is worth the seeking."

So what is truth? Are there shades of truth? Can one interpret truth in a way that allows for multiple meanings in order to tolerate differences or avoid conflicts? Is truth something we search for but never quite find? Is there such a thing as objective truth?

Truth can be defined as a statement of fact that is verifiable or a statement of a reasoned belief that requires a measure of faith for acceptance. Where there is truth there is trust and transparency. Truth is about being honest and carries with it the virtue of integrity. Truth provides the building block for character development, an essential trait for leadership.

Peter Drucker, the father of modern day management, has often noted that a leader must realize that the management of people is truly a liberal art. For a leader to be effective requires the understanding of the human condition and recognition that our humanity can not be defined solely by its physical, economic or rational nature. It also, he said, has a spiritual dimension. It is this spiritual side of our humanity that influences the development of our

character and our ability to determine truth from falsehood, right from wrong, good from evil, to love rather than to hate, and to make the necessary moral judgments of life.

In his classic work, *Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the famous Russian writer, argued that a line of good and evil passes through every human heart. He concluded that it was impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety but it was possible to recognize it and constrain it. For Solzhenitsyn, his source of truth and constraint came from God, an authority beyond himself. Years later in his commencement address to the students at Harvard University, Solzhenitsyn stated that this issue of determining ones source for moral and spiritual authority was the issue that split this world apart.

Now for me as a Christian, and a follower of Jesus Christ, I too have chosen God as my source of truth - providing a moral compass and spiritual authority for my life.

As I have come to this conclusion I do so not a philosopher or religious leader, but simply as a business person.

It is a choice that has affected the way I have lived my life and developed my relationships with others, including my wife, of now over 48 years,

my family of four children and their spouses, our 15 grandchildren, and my friends and colleagues in business.

Yes, there were those times of doubt and uncertainty and wondering whether I would ever measure up. Attending college and law school, seeking to establish a home, support a family, and develop my law profession, provided many challenges in this early phase of my journey. Then came changes in my career paths including a move from the practice of law to serving as a college administrator and faculty member: and then for over twenty-five years serving in the leadership of a fast growing public company that we called ServiceMaster.

As I have now retired from those leadership responsibilities at ServiceMaster and look back, I can add up the numbers that show growth in profits, customers served and a premium return for our shareholders. While these figures are part of a normal business assessment of performance, the conclusion for me cannot be limited to these money or value creation measurements. The lasting measurement is whether the results or the truth of my leadership can be told in the changed lives of the people I led.

As a business firm we wanted to excel in generating profits and creating value for our shareholders. If we didn't want to play by these rules we didn't

belong in the ballgame. But we also tried to encourage an environment where the workplace could be a community to help shape human character. We were in the business of serving customers but we were also in the business of developing people – not only in what they were doing, but also in who they were becoming. We considered the people of our firm as *The Soul of the Firm*.

So for me the seeking and knowing of truth has become a passion of life and has made a difference. Graduates, as you now come to this time of commencement, and move on to the life before you, I encourage you to pursue the seeking and knowing of truth. There is a purpose and meaning for your life – discover and develop it as you live it.

Rev. 5/1/08