

**Address by the President of Assumption University of Thailand  
at the 38<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises  
Queen Sirikit National Convention Center  
Saturday, January 22, 2011**

**Chairman of the University Council,  
President Emeritus,  
Campus Minister,  
Members of AU Community,  
Honored Guests,  
Families and Friends of the Graduates,  
Alumni, and  
Dear Graduates, Class XXXVIII**

On behalf of the AU administration, it is my honor and privilege to welcome all who are present here today at this distinguished 2011 Commencement Exercises. And of course let me first extend my sincerest and heartiest congratulations to all our graduates whose presences here today bear witness to their academic accomplishments.

Also allow me to thank all those who have made your present achievements possible. Most obviously are your parents, whose financial sacrifices and unflinching moral support carried you through good times and bad ones. Mention must be made of your peers, who have unfailingly accompanied, consoled, mentored you, giving you first-hand advice when you needed it.

You should be grateful to the university's faculty members and supporting staff, who, in many ways, have educated you and have helped you become a new person. Perhaps at times, you might not have liked the way they worked with you. But be assured that what they did was always done with good intentions and with your best interests in mind. A CEO recently defined the role of a leader as someone who asked "*people to do what they do not want to do and asking them to do it enthusiastically*" (Ghosn, 2010, as cited in Dautrey, 2010, p. 1). Clearly, our faculty members have acted so to advance your education and their actions reflect their commitment, care and dedication.

One way to measure the extent of your achievements is to look back on what happened to some of your class members since you first embarked on your AU journey.

Some dropped out, some delayed graduation, taking longer to fulfill their academic requirements, and some just disappeared. But you have made it! **Congratulations!**

The perseverance, purposefulness, and resilience which you have had to summon at times to reach this point will serve you well in the future, a future filled with opportunities and challenges. In this respect, what is awaiting you is no different from what faced previous graduates. Like them, you will be confronted with obstacles, problems, and crises. And like them, you also undoubtedly will encounter positive circumstances and be blessed with lucky turns of events. What is constantly changing, however, is the nature and magnitude and complexity of the challenges and opportunities ahead of you.

### **What Are the Challenges Facing You Today?**

We have just entered the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first one brought its share of fateful events, some man-made, some caused by nature. Such defining moments are part of the stark reality facing you and will help shape your future.

Globally, you have witnessed food scarcity, energy depletion, environmental disregard and its climate change and growing natural catastrophes; you have seen excesses result in a near-collapse of the financial system. The financial tremors resulting from the US-induced sub-prime crisis can still be felt in many parts of the world and there are predictions that warn us of the possibility of another slump. The recovery remains fragile and you will thus face uncertainties as you begin careers that may be marked in their early stages by deepening afflictions.

Domestically, internal political conflicts remain a threat to the peace and development of the country. In addition, the rapid appreciation of the baht against the US dollar over the past few months, as well as the flashfloods that wrecked havoc on many parts of the country, particularly in the Northeast, continue to have an impact on the economy and thus on well-being of many of our citizens. And as the ASEAN Economic Community 2015 looms, regional competition is intensifying. Although this may be cold comfort to you, these problems, however, are not specific to Thailand.

Take China. In 2009, 6.1 million students who graduated from China's universities, already faced a formidable challenge as they competed for jobs during an economic downturn. By 2011, state sources predict that the number of Chinese university graduates will reach a staggering 7.6 million each year. Creating the conditions for them to find jobs has become a top priority for the Chinese government. In the USA, about 2.4 million students will graduate with bachelor's and associate degrees as part of the Class of 2010 (Petrecca, 2010). Given the sluggish recovery there, their attempt to find employment

promises to be quite challenging, all the more as the world's economic epicenter gradually moves eastward.

Such developments will be likely to have an impact on your professional lives. When you first joined AU, most of you probably expected to land great jobs right after graduating, possibly with a high salary and the prospect of an ever-better life thereafter. Many predictions suggest trends that will make this difficult, as you compete head-to-head, not only with your fellow graduates, but also with laid-off workers, financially-strapped retirees, and those 2008 and 2009 graduates who have not yet found employment.

Many of you might be thinking that in graduating during such seemingly inauspicious times, is a mark of your bad luck. But I want to emphasize that it is not so!

You must take the larger picture. Humanity has been plagued by both natural and man-made disasters from time immemorial. Moreover, adversity brings opportunities. First and foremost, the opportunity to learn from what has happened in the past. You must therefore creatively reflect on what can be learned from the past, how to use that knowledge to meet today's challenging circumstances. You must think hard about how to remedy today's ills.

There is obviously no short, easy, and ready answer to this. What is clear, though, is that poverty, conflicts, global warming, economic crises, migration, pandemics, terrorism, international crimes and many other issues have consequences that cannot be managed at an individual level. They require global strategies and concerted efforts. Do not think that all these problems can be solved overnight. This, however, is not to say that nothing can be done at a personal level. On the contrary!

As you leave academic life and face the world you must make sure to use what you have learned both within and outside the classroom. No matter where you come from you must play your part in the solution to the myriad of problems, even if that part seems small to you. These will vary from country to country. In Thailand, for example, the "6 days, 63 Million Opinions" survey of the country conducted by the National Statistical Institute identified the main issues that must be tackled to alleviate economic hardship, solving political problems, ending corruption and improving the quality of life.

As you will have realized by now, my purpose today is not to share a few hints about how to get a job or become rich, but to deepen your **understanding** of the world, to serve the cause of **wisdom**, and to inspire you to respond creatively to the many problems

that the world faces. And, this goes well beyond the workplace. So, allow me to briefly reflect on your life outside the office.

### **Life Outside Work**

Even though you will spend much of your days at work, what you bring to the workplace is largely shaped by your attitude outside the office. The following guiding principles in life are recommended:

1. Be ethical: Ethical behavior is fundamental to long-term success in life as well as in business. Be firm, consistent, honest and fair in your dealings! Do not bow to greed! Act out of integrity! Develop a code of conduct that spells out the principles of ethical behavior you expect others to have in their dealings with you and adhere to it.

2. Be disciplined: Self-discipline is one of the keys to personal greatness. With self-discipline, the average person can rise as far as and as fast as his or her talents and intelligence will allow. But without self-discipline, a person will seldom rise above mediocrity. Self-discipline gives control over your life and makes your goals attainable. It is essential to your professional life.

3. Cultivate friendship: It's challenging to make friends and equally challenging to keep them. Your friends become your second family. There are things in life that can only be shared with our closest friends. Friends are part of your support system.

4. Share and help others: One of the key components of success is our inclination to apply all our talents to the best of our ability and share them with others, at work, in our community, and with friends and neighbors. Develop a belief in giving back to others! See the good in others and learn to give and do it gladly! Learning to share your time and resources with others will help you reach your full potential as a truly caring and considerate human being.

5. Be true to yourself: Being true to your values and beliefs is critical to your happiness and well-being and to facilitating the transformations you will undergo during life. Have confidence in yourself, in your competencies and capabilities and believe that who you are does indeed make a difference!

6. Strive for balance: Keep your work and personal life in balance! You must make time for your family and guard your personal time no matter what. Too many activities will deplete you and weaken your relationships. Understandably, there are times when you have to put the institution ahead of your personal life. A work/life balance,

however, does not mean being in perfect balance all the time. What matters is that you recognize when you are out of balance and restore it.

### **These Principles Are Grounds for Optimism**

Although I started this speech on a somewhat pessimistic note, outlining the afflictions of the past decade, there are also clear reasons to remain hopeful; the main one being you and your resolve to be ethical, self-disciplined, true to yourself, generous and considerate. AU has provided you with good moral and intellectual foundations on which to build. Make the most of them. This is where your ability, as an individual, to make the world a better place comes in and this is what I want you to remember from this graduation.

This will also make your life meaningful. The writer Mitch Albom in Tuesdays with Morrie well captures the essence of my message to you:

*So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they are busy doing things they think are important. This is because they are chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning. (Albom, 1997, p. 43)*

Another reason to remain confident in the future is that while human beings may have a destructive streak to them, they are also capable of altruism, self-abnegation, courage and excellence. Examples abound. The successful conclusion to the operation to retrieve 33 trapped miners from the collapsed San Jose gold and copper mine, in Chile is one; the building of a seven billion euro tunnel the world's largest, from the Italian city of Milan to Zurich is another. Closer to home I can point out, for example to the 57 km. high-speed rail link between the cantons of Bern and Valais, which will open in 2017. Each of these illustrates human greatness as exemplified in our great history of technological breakthroughs that attest to mankind's greatness.

Such conquests, however, often followed long periods of trial and error and failures. Likewise, in the course of your life; there will be times when you will do well, and times when you will fail. But neither your doing well nor your failing are the yardsticks by which success should be measured. If you fail, then start over again. Keep on trying! And be proud of yourself through every step of the way! Who you are does make a difference and I want you to know that.

Recall the quotation inscribed on the wall in the hall of the John Paul II gymnasium at Suvarnabhumi campus: *"the purpose of sport is not to win but to participate*

and educate ...[it] should serve as an inspiration to you to struggle to live on and move ahead in life." That says it all.

Another reason yet for you to look ahead with optimism is the English education you have received at AU. A recent Bangkok Post article, addressing the short supply of qualified candidates in 2011, states in part: **"Especially short in supply are candidates with good English-language ability."** (Prachyakorn, 2010, p. B2). This is no doubt good news for you! But, this is also a reminder of the need for you to keep developing your knowledge – and improving your linguistic skills – because jobs are becoming more temporary. And even if you keep the same job throughout your career, new circumstances will keep arising, requiring a capacity to **"learn to learn."** This will require, as already noted, having self-discipline and moral and intellectual integrity.

**Dear Graduates:**

Two quick points before closing this address! First, you will no longer show up for class. But even though your life will no longer revolve around AU, you will still be part of it. And, as soon-to-be alumni and members of the AU family, your role is to help to chart the future of AU and be part of its transformation as a sustainable institution.

Working as a team in an "esprit de corps," establishing participative channels for all of you to share your thoughts and ideas is precisely what last year's celebrations marking AU 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary were about. As all of us put our ideas together, we will take a leap into the future together certain to achieve a truly extraordinary 5<sup>th</sup> decade of excellence and beyond. \*

Second, in addition to being an AU team member, each of you has also now become an AU ambassador to the world. So, please behave accordingly and becomingly and do come back to your alma mater whenever you can!

Congratulations and best wishes to all of you once again! May God bless you and guide you in all your undertakings!

**Bancha Saenghiran, f.s.g., Ph.D.**

President

January 22, 2011