

GRADUATION SPEECH for FIRE SUMMER BATCH 2014

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Our beloved professors,
dear parents, siblings, spouses, special someone, superiors, children and guests,
good afternoon.

Disclaimer: The last time I gave a response of this kind during a graduation was during my elementary graduation so pardon the lack of practice. I hope I will not take so much of your time but if I do, feel free to doze off and try to win 2048 on your phones.

I saw on FB one day, that an Atenean paper often begins with a random quote from a random person. Which he or she will afterwards develop into a long paper padded with motherhood statements, bola, cliches and even more bola. Therefore, just like any Atenean, let me begin by quoting a line from the ever-so-gasgas CT 5 (Catechesi Tradendae 5) by John Paul II, which states: "the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ."

But unlike that so-called typical Atenean paper, I hope to make use of this quote as my inspirational backdrop (bbq stick) in tying (make tuhog) all of my sharing this afternoon.

I'm deeply honored to speak in front of everyone for the simple reason that I'll be speaking on behalf of the 25 embodied spirits who will graduate today. I hope that by being chosen by them, I will be able to give justice to their thoughts and feelings now that we have reached the end - to all studying and comprehending (at least for now), to all the working and toiling to make ground plans, syllabi, catechetical materials and mini-theses, and to all the laughing and crying while reviewing for the compre.

This is it. Finally, we are here. Hindi lang natin naamoy, nalalasap o nalalasan ang tuyo ng kapitbahay, heto na at kinakain na natin siya.

Statement of the Problem: How can I capture into words this beautiful moment in our teaching lives? Paano ko ba ipaliliwanag ang lasa ng tuyong nakakain na natin? Hindi naman siguro lasang patis.

I go back to when I used to sit there at the sides of the chapel - when I listened to speakers share their FIRE journey — which included funny stories. Their sharing always and I mean always boils down to a profound experience of love and gratitude - which I (and all of my batchmates I presume) deeply understand and of course feel right now.

And so I would like to use this opportunity to share with everyone this same story but this time... it is our (Batch 2014's) story. I will do this inspired by the preaching-strategy of my currently-favorite Jesuit, Pope Francis and my favorite bishop, Wilson Cardinal Espiritu. Yes, I will use three points or in this case... catch-words. Catch-words we found ourselves saying, repeating over and over again this summer. VOCATION. LIBRARY. FAMILY.

VOCATION.

The first of our compre thesis statements. [Sr. Sylvia and Ate Mae reported on right away]

The last question in our comprehensive examinations. [Jaycee, wink wink]
What does this say about our journey?

Our FIRE journey began with vocation. If you will look at our batch, you will see that we are actually a melting pot of various backgrounds — two loving nuns, an ilocano priest, a missionary, a cpa-turned-catechist-nanay, a muslim-turned-catholic, a math-teacher-turned-sister, an elementary-turned-college teacher, cle department chairpersons, humble teachers, holy-spirit schoolmates, musicians, family men and women... We practically come from different walks of life. And yet, we were able to come together in FIRE. I would like to believe that we were led here by a common vocation, a calling to serve God through the ministry of teaching the faith, in the hope of facilitating a relationship between our students or our audience and Jesus Christ. (footnote, CT 5)

The word VOCATION reminds me of what FIRE strengthened in all of us. Vocation is not just a one time thing. It has to be nourished. It has to be strengthened. FIRE nourished our vocation. It made us question: “Why are we here? Why do we do these? Who is this for?” By answering these tough questions and facing them head-on, we were empowered to commit to it even more. For instance, in one of our orientation days, Sir Ray asked us about our opinion on those “leaving the Church”. What he ended with left a mark on me. How do we make our students (the sheep) fall in love with the shepherd? This question and many other questions and thoughts that provoked me, that provoked us, helped us examine, fall in love with and commit even more to this vocation.

To our “younger” FIREmates, allow FIRE to provoke you with tough questions that you may examine, fall in love again with and commit to your vocation.

LIBRARY.

The choice-tambayan for studying/sleeping/beating-the-summer-heat
The home of our compre reviews, group reporting preps, etc.

Our FIRE journey opened a library inside and outside.

Because of FIRE, we were able to grow our own libraries. It is only in FIRE that I was able to collect many interesting and relevant readings in our ministry. Some of us have used up all our summer salary just to purchase new books and to photocopy readings (even those not for our classes). Joke nga pambili na lang ng gatas o diaper, pinambibili pa ng libro. While other teachers use their money to go to the beach, here we are getting more books as if we have few things to read and as if we had nothing to do. In fact, during our compre reviews dahil sobrang dami ng pwedeng basahin at gustong basahin, hindi na namin alam kung ano ang sisimulan. cf. Zarina and Sister Marnie.

I think this library outside is but an indication of what FIRE meant to us and what FIRE established within each and everyone of us. FIRE has opened our library within. In sharing the faith and in teaching about saving truths and loving knowledge, we learned that it is not enough that we just recall what we learned from our own CLE teachers, we also need to increase the books in our library within. We were enlightened to read the Scriptures holistically (and locate the passages well just like Chai and Goldie who can't find Timothy, or Hadje and his John 4 Last Supper). We were opened to new names like Anscar Chupungco, Kathleen Harmon, Avery Dulles, Elizabeth Johnson, Karl Rahner. We got to taste the vast vault of materials from the tin cans, to the Rizal Lib to the Gehring Library in the LST. We engaged in provocative questioning, talk-to-seatmate conversations and the bigger group havruta. In building the library within, we got to expand and deepen our own vocation, through the additional loving knowledge we gained from all these studying. We were taught not only to read and lift sentences from the CFC, which Father mentioned as the second most important book next to the Bible for FIRE students. We were also taught to be critical, to research, to make sense, and to synthesize. These opened the library of the

Christian religious educator within. Ask any one of us. I'm sure, he or she can discuss any topic now with more sources and skills than when we began in this journey.

As a side reflection...Just like our Rizal Lib here, we know that FIRE is a place where we can return to, settle down, read and rest. It will always be like a home to us for learning and deepening our own relationship with Christ. (Footnote, CT5)

To our "younger" FIREmates, cultivate your own library in FIRE. Don't just collect readings. Allow our teachers and their lessons to build the library within.

FAMILY.

The main theme of the mini-thesis.

What we consider one another most especially now.

Who we return to after every gruelling FIRE project or encounter.

Yesterday, while having coffee with batchmates, I called my aunt who is a part of a religious congregation. I told her about graduating today. After our conversation, I looked at those I was at table with and realized the connection between my own family and FIRE. Somehow, FIRE has turned from a mere degree program to a community bordering on family. It's like being adopted sons and daughters of ... I don't know.

When I first entered the classrooms of FIRE, Sir Ray kept on saying and even insisting that we are a community. So, we did not only engage in rigorous intellectual exercises. May outing. May socials. May videoke nights. The pursuits of the mind were made even more meaningful through friendships that deepen every summer. We all knew that we were all in these together. Giving feedback to one another was made more acceptable. Making catechetical materials was made more enjoyable. Reviewing for compre was not a stressful affair for we were able to laugh at ourselves, carry ourselves through and cheer each other on. Now, as you have seen or experienced, we are not just classmates, we are a family. From a masungit, suplado, Xavier teacher who only talked to my tablemates from ICA, I found myself deeply concerned and much more available for my FIREmates for they are not only classmates, they are family.

To our "younger" FIREmates, love your family here in FIRE. Learning about the faith will definitely take a whole new meaning.

Speaking of family, this is the perfect opportunity to thank all those that make up this entire FIRE family.

First of all, to all our teachers. We have nothing else to say but thank you. THANK YOU. While many of your colleagues are on their own vacation, here you are with us doing more than just teaching — asking us how we are, showing your concern for us — they mean so much to us. You all have made us fall in love with JESUS, with what we do, and to some of us with you (joke... with your knowledge pala). Sir Chips. :D

This list is in order of appearance/schedule since first summer, Thank you Ma'am Trish and Ma'am Mariles, Sir BobbyGuev and Sir Ruben, Sir Herman and Ma'am Tinnah. Thank you Ma'am Lucille and Ma'am Trish, Sir Ruben and Ma'am Rae, Fr. Dan and Sir Raoul. Thank you to Ma'am Rae and Sir Ray, Sir Mike and Sir Ruben, and for Sir Ray and Ma'am Rae (Mangyan and black sand experience). Finally this year, thank you to Sir Ray (our true ray of truth) for guiding us through our reviews. Ma'am Rae and Ma'am Trish for assisting the mini-thesis process. For our panelists, who were our teachers in one subject or two and have witnessed our journey here. Maraming Salamat po.

We would like to thank Ate Mye, who is according to Sir Ray our one and true boss. You have looked out for us all these years, walking to and from the department to LST or to Bellarmine. Either way, malayo yun. Maraming salamat sa pag-aaruga at pagmamahal.

We would like to thank the FIREmates in our batch who have walked with us in this journey but weren't able to finish with us today [acknowledge their presence] eor are yet to finish their own journey. We hope that you will be able to continue your FIRE journey when time (or your bosses) permit. We love you all.

We would like to thank all our FIREmates from different batches then and now. You have certainly made family all the more meaningful in this experience. Who can ever forget the welcoming presence of a Heart and a Nev. They are two of the many faces who make this community a family as well. A special thanks to those who made this graduation ceremony and program possible.

In a special way, we would like to thank Fr. Roche. I think we were the first batch who were not able to have him as a teacher. Only a few of us graduating today have had an experience of being under him. And yet, we owe him a lot for this program. In our hearts, we thank you Father for planting the seeds of this wonderful experience.

On a personal note, thank you to my fellow graduating FIREmates. It was a worthwhile experience. The journey of knowing Christ with all of you made it even more meaningful and enjoyable. From the kaptibahayan reviews to the sambayanan reviews, to the tawanan lunch breaks, to the isaw-isaw sa UP, to the library tambay, to the boom-patis, lahat-lahat na. Jelly, Ate Marie, Fr. Dino, Goldie, Wilson, Jen, Jaycee, Sistery Percy, Reng, Ann, Ate Mae, Chai, Ate gi, Zenky, Peaches, Weng, Steph, Marnie, Ronald, Hadje, Sister Sylvia, Prince, Carly, and Dina. Maraming maraming salamat. I think you feel the same way about how much we love each other (well at least not romantically). So I speak on behalf of everyone, when I say "I love you all."

Speaking of Jesus Christ, we go back to him. Thank you Lord for bringing us together and making yourself present in our daily experiences here in FIRE. The teachers, the lessons, the activities, the classmates... all these made us want to know you ever so deeply, that we may love you more ardently and follow you more closely. Indeed, everything began and now will end with you. We hope when we go back to our teaching, we keep in mind that the aim of what we do is a relationship with you. (CT5 once again)

VOCATION. LIBRARY. FAMILY.

FIRE has strengthened our vocation in teaching.

FIRE has opened the library of the teacher within.

FIRE has given me a family of fellow learners and teachers.

FIRE made us realize that indeed proclaiming the Gospel is such a joyful affair.

All for the love and service of Jesus Christ.

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To end, let me ask again, was I able to give justice to what my classmates think and feel?

I don't think so because **words are not enough**
to express our gratitude
to this gift of education,
of friendship, and of great love of God
that was enriched with our journey in FIRE.

Let me say it once again
and we (all of us here) will never
get tired of saying this:

from the bottom of our hearts
THANK YOU AND
MARAMING MARAMING SALAMAT PO.

We may go our separate ways... To the islands of palawan, to the mountains of baguio or all the way up to ilocos.... Or even if we just stay here in manila, let's not forget what FIRE has brought us - to be in communion with Jesus Christ (Yes, CT5 once again.)

Let's all go and set this world on FIRE. Maraming salamat po.