



Crossroads 20th Anniversary

Remarks delivered by Mary Beth Klee

September 24, 2011

Javier and I are very grateful to be here tonight, celebrating Crossroads past and future with you. Congratulations to us all. A November definition kept echoing through my mind as I was preparing for this event:

“Gratitude is thankfulness for the gift of life and the gifts in life.”

That is the definition Crossroads children are taught every November. And they’re words very much on my mind now.

First of all, gratitude to our hosts — Heidi and Cam Eldred, and to Lisa Ferneau, and all the current Board members and administrators who have been working so diligently to commemorate this year of founding. They’ve got a whole series of events and festivities planned to look back and look forward.

But this is an especially lovely gathering and very touching for me personally to see so many friends I haven’t seen in years. From the school’s first teachers and parents to its Board members and benefactors. Thank you for making it possible for all of us to be together to toast past efforts and future successes.

Well twenty years ago, we planted what turned out to be a hardy seedling — one that sprouted quickly and required lots of tending and nurturing. At that first assembly on our first day of school nearly two decades ago, we had 15 students (8 of whom were kindergartners) — and I see several of their parents here tonight. We had an opening psalm, and then I spoke with the children and urged them to live the school’s goals — “Do your best and be your best.” After that Karen Kilibarda shepherded the kindergartners off to their first day at school, while Betsy Warren and Ruth Swift corralled the multi-age group into their classroom. And teary-eyed parents chatted excitedly near the St. Denis kitchen and outside, too, on the lawn.

Just a few weeks ago, I was honored to lead the psalm at the school’s opening day assembly in the new Bancroft Center, and look out at almost 140 faces (but still eight kindergartners!) And I heard Jean Behnke speak to the kids about the school’s mission and urge them to “do your best and be your best” — and Betsy looked over at me and winked. There were more teary-eyed parents and grandparents than you can imagine at that assembly in that glorious gym/auditorium and upwards of 20 faculty members and staff.

Those of us who love this school have a lot to be grateful for.

We can draw dramatic contrasts between 1991 and 2011. We began in the (dark) basement of St. Denis — borrowed space in downtown Hanover (gratitude to Father Kelliher, may he rest in peace). Less than 5 years later the school was in Lyme on several acres of land in our own (bright) building at Dartmouth College Highway. A few years after that, extraordinarily generous parents — the Dwights and the Mulvihills — made it possible to purchase 140 acres of land adjacent to the school, and then several years after that many of you were part of the capital campaign that allowed the construction of the beautiful Bancroft Center.

As I said, we began with 15 students. The Warrens, the Swifts, and Valenzuelas all had children in the first grade that first year. By the time our own children graduated from eighth grade on the Lyme campus, the school had 140 students, and we were on 145 acres.

God is good.

I consider the school's flourishing during that time and since, a tribute to both **people and ideas**. It is a tribute to the extraordinary efforts of many who are here tonight, and some of whom are not. (The Izensons were not able to be here tonight, but they were absolutely key to the start-up — indispensable.)

I think of Karen Kilibarda, our first kindergarten teacher, and know in my heart that Crossroads might never have succeeded without her. She was the finest, most competent, caring kindergarten teacher one could hope for, and completely unfazed by doing a continent unit with kindergartners or an Old West unit or an amazing human body unit — in addition to phonics and math. People flocked to the Crossroads kindergarten over the next few years because they wanted their kids to have Karen! I am also very grateful to the Swifts who entrusted us with Amy and Katie, and to Ruth, who stepped up to the plate to teach science and more that first year in the multiage classroom.

And where would this school be without the Warrens?! All three Warren children went through Crossroads, but Betsy has really been the school's rudder. She was my faithful friend and partner in the set-up of the school. She taught in the original kindergarten extension course program in 1991. She was our lead teacher in the multi-age that first year, then in several other grades over the years before moving on to Middle School and Director of Admissions. She's got the mission in her bones!

I am, and we should all be, grateful to the courageous parents of that first group of students. They took a chance on what was a maverick venture at the time. And I remember so many of them tonight — the Stearns, the LaMontagnes, the Bements, the Masons, the Swifts, the Thorntons. The Izensons, of course. And there was a group who came shortly after them — including the Simonds and Dwights and Tsais.

A wonderful teacher came shortly thereafter, too — Vicky Price joined us in our second year as a day school in the basement of St. Denis, teaching science and so much more.

Our festivities tonight are billed as a "founders" (plural) event. And that is so appropriate. These gutsy parents and first teachers and their children are in a true sense, all founders. They were *all in* on the most important decision a parent or teacher can make — how to educate children.

And just a side-note: they were in — in the face of adversity. We did something extremely far-sighted in the start-up of the school. When we had the kindergarten extension course program underway, we hired the Tuck School at Dartmouth College to do a market analysis for us, and determine if this school with this mission could succeed in the Upper Valley. Was there demand? Market? Resources to support it?

Three months and a team of five graduate students later, they proffered a very full 80-page report, and gave us a presentation on why this project was unlikely to succeed. They strongly advised against walking down this road. I still remember Joe Daschbach, who had done all our legal work for the incorporation, reading the report and saying, “You got real depth with this report, Mary Beth. You ought to think twice about moving ahead with this.”

Fortunately, Javier and I have always been optimists, reared in the Winston Churchill school of “Never, never, never, never give up!” Jota was starting his own company at the time (Mikros). So gosh, why shouldn’t we start a school too?

In the next six years, a great deal of growth and flourishing proved the young Tuck School pundits wrong. We had 15 students in 1992, 45 in the basement of St. Denis in ’93. I will never forget the day in 1993 when I gave a presentation about Crossroads at the Hanover Rotary, and afterwards real estate developer Bayne Stevenson came up to me and said, “What can I do to help?” And I said, “We need a building.” Nine months later we were at Dartmouth College Highway with 70 plus students in 1994, and then 90 students in 1995.

Gratitude! So many other people here contributed in significant ways. Paula Tsai catalogued every book that came to our library and was an invaluable resource for teachers. Dennis Logue and Norm Wakely have been here for the school in good times and bad. The Byrnes were among the first to contribute significantly to our scholarship fund. So many good people.

The school’s flourishing is, as I’ve said, a testimony to the efforts of many selfless, smart, and very devoted people, but it is ultimately a tribute to the soundness of the school’s mission.

Lots of schools are staffed and populated by hard-working, caring individuals who give their all. But ultimately, the key to academic success and personal flourishing on the K–8 level is academic and moral excellence, carefully sequenced instruction, and love of the good.

The key ideas on which Crossroads was founded — content and character, knowledge and virtue are the cornerstones for the school’s success. They’ve been encapsulated in two programs the school is using: *Core Knowledge* and *Core Virtues*, each of which reinforce *each other* in very synergistic ways.

You have only to look at our graduates to know that this is true. They’ve attended or are attending Harvard, MIT, Columbia, Brown, Tufts, Notre Dame, Williams, and Oxford College. More important, they’re in Teach for America. They’ve chosen to spend their summers building homes in Honduras, working in clinics in Guatemala, working with the sick at pilgrimages in Lourdes. Many of you, who are here tonight, are seeing the fruits of your efforts and the school’s efforts on your children when they are small. Just wait until they are adults. You will be so proud of them!

As we review what the school has to be proud of, and thankful for in the way of mission, I want to mention the ongoing ripple effect of the *Core Virtues Program*. I developed it while Head of School at Crossroads and the program was first piloted at Crossroads. It is now in hundreds of schools nation- and world-wide. A principal in Connecticut told me that his school (which is using the program) had learned about it from a school in London! The school in London learned about it from an American school in Switzerland.

Core Virtues has been in print for 15 years, but we've just gotten a website up to promote it (www.corevirtues.net), and if you look at the section: "Core Virtues in Action," you'll see Crossroads featured there. My intention is to have the entire program online for free within a year, but we've got good bones there now. Do take a look and forward it to as many people as you would like!

Now two final notes of gratitude on this night: one is to my husband, Javier. We started the school together, and he actually served on its Board longer than I did — churning out more Excel spreadsheets, statistical analysis, policy handbooks, and sound counsel than you can imagine. He did this as his extracurricular while he was in the process of launching his own company, Mikros, and for the first two years, still working full time at Creare. Without his unwavering support, I could never have launched this vessel.

When our family left the Upper Valley in 2000, the school was on its current site and had grown from K-3 to K-8. It had nearly ten years of education under its belt, and it was no longer just a seedling. But I think it could still have been described as a sapling, rather than a tree. We had gone through some rough times. The irrepressible Norm Wakely and extraordinarily devoted Vicky Price had taken over as interim Heads, and Dennis Logue was serving as Chairman of the Board.

A year later Jean Behnke was hired as Head of School, and Crossroads was never more richly blessed. Jean — with her love of children, love of learning, and love of the school's mission has nurtured the sapling into a strong young tree. (That's why I'm wearing green.) I cannot think of anyone we owe greater gratitude to than Jean. The Good Lord sent her at exactly the right moment. She has patiently consolidated, shored up institutions and people, and built program and facility tirelessly. Under her leadership, as the school enters its twenty-first year, it is truly an adult! I'm delighted she's going to be here for the foreseeable future, and reflecting on the future tonight!

So, I thank God for his goodness to Crossroads, and I thank all of you, the true founders!