

Candlelight Vigil at OCC • Wednesday, September 11, 2002

Remarks of Dr. JON H. LARSON, OCC PRESIDENT

It is a privilege and an honor to welcome all of you to our beautiful campus setting here at your college – Ocean County College. I speak to you this evening on behalf of the trustees, faculty and staff, my colleagues and my own family – one of whom is with me tonight ... my wife Judy – all of whom I love – and of course also from my own heart ... but especially on behalf of the students of Ocean County College – whom all of us care about and care for deeply.

Our students, like our entire community and nation, were hit very hard by the repugnant acts of barbarism perpetrated on September 11th, OCC's students have responded in ways that make me swell with pride. Tonight's candlelight memorial is a wonderful illustration of the responsible caring and patriotic, yet tolerant, approach to commemorating this horrific event and the sacrifices of thousands killed and injured on that fateful day that our OCC students have taken from the very beginning.

Our students, like our entire community and nation, have felt fear, have shed tears, have experienced confusion and anger, and, ultimately, have discovered a growing resolve. Through it all, OCC's students have shown pride in their country; have resolutely displayed the American flag on their sweaters, coat lapels and jeans; on their faces, etched on their nails, or just held in their hands and waved as so many of you are doing here, once again, tonight. And it makes me swell with pride!

Our students have demonstrated their appreciation, admiration and respect for the heroism and determination of the people of New York and our Nation's Capitol in many ways and on many occasions, but most importantly OCC students have led by example, insisting that we as a nation respond intelligently and righteously and, when necessary, fiercely, but also insisting that we not abandon our principles, cemented into our national consciousness in the immortal words of the American Constitution which guarantees life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to all our citizens! No! Our students have said NO to expressions of intolerance of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans. Our students have

REJECTED simple guilt by association and have instead responded with a generosity of spirit that is simply wonderful to observe.

Our students, like our entire community and nation, horrified by the diabolical attack on innocent and defenseless people right here on our doorstep, are reflecting the emergence, all across America, of a new respect for the heroic. Our students, like our entire community and nation, want to help, want to remember, want to help devise a solution that permits us to feel safe and restores our belief in the essential goodness of humankind ... that helps us cope with this atrocity without sinking into an endless cycle of vengeance and retaliation.

Our students are maturing ... preparing to take on the role of tomorrow's leaders. And all those of us associated with OCC take special satisfaction in witnessing this growth and development. The vital role colleges and universities play in our society is linked at its core with the preservation of the civilized world. For what distinguishes us as a nation, as it does all free nations, is our ability to apply fairly the rules of conduct that guarantee freedom and enable us to live together in peace and harmony.

The education that colleges and universities provide opens the door to every art and science and to every philosophy that enables humankind to understand how to live together in happiness and prosperity, and how important it is to preserve, and sometimes how necessary it is to FIGHT to preserve, our right to live free – free of fear, free to worship God as we see fit, free to think and speak the truth.

Our students understand that they, like the students at all the other great colleges and universities in America, have had thrust upon them the mantle of responsibility to provide a vision of peace and happiness and a promise of hope for the future. For it is only with hope in our hearts that our Nation, and all other civilized cultures of the world, can live free to pursue our dreams ... our individual visions of happiness.

Our students and the response they have given to these terrible and fearsome threats give me assurance and fill me with hope. So I want to say, "Thank you," to our students. "Thank you," to the Circle K Club of Ocean County College. Thank you for

giving us a clear, strong, and resounding assurance that the future of our entire community and nation is in very capable, very thoughtful, very strong, very good hands! And, to each of you here tonight, thank you for being here to participate in this remembrance.

I will close by reading a poem in memory of all those who perished on September 11, 2001; the passengers and the pilots on the United Air and American Airlines flights, the workers in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and all the innocent bystanders. Our prayers go out to the friends and families of the deceased.

"IF I KNEW"

If I knew it would be the last time
That I'd see you fall asleep,
I would tuck you in more tightly
and pray the Lord, your soul to keep.

If I knew it would be the last time
that I see you walk out the door,
I would give you a hug and kiss
and call you back for one more.

If I knew it would be the last time
I'd hear your voice lifted up in praise,
I would video tape each action and word,
so I could play them back day after day.

If I knew it would be the last time,
I could spare an extra minute
to stop and say "I love you,"
instead of assuming you would KNOW I do.

If I knew it would be the last time
I would be there to share your day,

Well I'm sure you'll have so many more,
so I can let just this one slip away.

For surely there's always tomorrow
to make up for an oversight,
and we always get a second chance
to make everything just right.

There will always be another day
to say "I love you,"
And certainly there's another chance
to say our "Anything I can do?"

But just in case I might be wrong,
and today is all I get,
I'd like to say how much I love you
and I hope we never forget.

Tomorrow is not promised to anyone,
young or old alike,
And today may be the last chance
you get to hold your loved one tight.

So if you're waiting for tomorrow,
why not do it today?
For if tomorrow never comes,
you'll surely regret the day,

That you didn't take that extra time
for a smile, a hug, or a kiss
and you were too busy to grant someone,
what turned out to be their one last wish.

So hold your loved ones close today,
and whisper in their ear,
Tell them how much you love them
and that you'll always hold them dear.

Take time to say "I'm sorry,"
"Please forgive me," "Thank you," or "It's okay."
And if tomorrow never comes,
you'll have no regrets about today.

May God bless each of you ... and may God bless America!