

Orientation Opening Service 2004: Light the Fire Reflection

Light the fire in me. As we come together as a group for the first time, let us open our hearts to one another, as we will continue to do throughout this orientation and the coming year. At this time, I would like to ask the volunteers to stand up one at a time and share your name, your hometown and the city in which you will be serving. As we begin our time together, we acknowledge the many different places from which we all traveled and to pray in gratitude for the open hearts, which allowed each of you to welcome this new experience.

Light the fire of Responsibility.

Realize that who you are is an integral part of who we are collectively, just as this is one string of lights with many bulbs, so are you one Responsibility family with many members. Each of you play a special role that you have been called to act on as a member of Response-Ability. Your role will challenge you to shine, and you will need to rely, not only on the wisdom you have already gained from your past, but you will also need to rely on an open heart with which to share your unique gifts. These gifts are your light, a celebration of whom you are as God made you. How you use these gifts is up to you, how you choose you shine is for you to discover. We are not here to outshine one another, only to be strong as individuals and thereby, strengthen the light emitted from the entire group. Your call to act responsibly is a challenge to not only light the fire, but to keep it burning in you and in your community. We cannot do this alone. This will be a year of joys and challenges that require a great deal of strength and support. Who then is a better source of strength and understanding than God? For it is God who made us, who knows us and loves us. This is where we gain our strength. Just as this string of light requires a source of power, so do we. Your commitment to each other and faith in God give you power from which you will draw on throughout the year. We ask that we may look to god as a source of direction and strength so that here may be light in our journey.

Light the fire of integrity. We hold in our daily practices a certain level of integrity. Having Integrity means being wholly honest and upright in all that we think, say, and do. Our thoughts befit our words; our words befit our actions. May we ask for the strength to lead a life of truth so that our thoughts give us words of truth and our words lead us to honest action.

Light the fire of Responsibility and Integrity.

Light the fire of Education . Education calls for temperance and confidence. Remember the teachers who fanned the flame of your excitement about teaching? What a gift it was for them to ignite that spark in your life. What joy for them to have ignited a vocation in you.

Ritual: Each volunteer will come up and introduce themselves and their service site.

Light the fire of temperance. Be aware of striking a healthy balance in your life. Remember that it is not selfish to take time for yourself. It is only in rejuvenating yourselves that will enable you to be more fully present to your community and your class and your graduate studies. To devote your time to teach wholeheartedly means to fill yourself up with passion and then give it away.

Light the fire of confidence. Let us not mistake self-love and confidence for self importance; one can be most and confident simultaneously. It is that easy confidence that is necessary to be an effective teacher who faces challenging situations with grace. It is said that “If we don’t find God in all then we don’t find God at all.”

In many ways, teaching helps a person become more fully himself or herself. Teaching is a process of finding our true selves and believing in one’s own efficacy. As Parker Palmer states in *The Courage to Teach*, “I teach the things I care about and what I care about helps define my selfhood.” In the classical understanding, “education is the attempt to lead out from within the self a core of wisdom that has the power to reveal the light of truth.” The author, to whom many of us can relate, admits his continued insecurity when facing a new group of students. Although doubt and nervousness may never subside, it is

comforting to know that even veteran teachers must override self-doubt with confidence. Trust in the Holy Spirit to light the fire of confidence in yourself and your teaching.

I would like to end with something that a Holy Child sister once said to my undergraduate Education class here at Rosemont. "IT is not how smart you are that makes you a good teacher, but how much of you you put into your teaching." God bless all of you for accepting the challenge of teaching with temperance and courage. Light the fire of education.

Light the Fire of Community - Community calls for Action, Reverence and Faith.

By joining RA, you have chosen to make community a central part of your life. With a commitment to faith based living, RA volunteers are more than a group of teachers living in the same house, they are a group of people who have made a commitment to support, challenge and affirm one another. Forming a community takes effort and care on the part of all members. Living in an RA community requires action and reverence.

LIGHT THE FIRE OF ACTION

The mission of the Holy Child sisters is to help others understand that God "lives and acts in them and in the world and to rejoice" in God's presence. God lives and acts in us. We are called to rejoice in God's presence....we are called to ACT and REJOICE for God is present and working in us and in those around us. In our RA communities, we aim to ACT out of love, reverence and a spirit of rejoicing.

Community is made- it does not just happen- community requires action and work on the part of each of you. Our program sets expectations, but it is up to you to bring your community to life. In the words of the SHCJ foundress Cornelia Connelly, we are called to "actions not words"; your actions will make your community what it is- actions such as organizing a fun night out for your house,

doing your house jobs on time so that the house is a place you want to come home to, cleaning out the fridge or setting the table even if it's not your given job to help someone else out, gathering everyone for prayer time, initiating a difficult but necessary conversation with a community member who has upset you, inviting someone to join you for a community shopping trip to the local grocery store, pouring a morning cup of coffee for another community member before school to start the day off right, all these seemingly small actions make a big difference when it comes to forming community. By doing more than you are asked to do, your community can become more than a group of people living under the same roof and instead a group of young adults who shine as a light in your city of service by promoting joy, reverence, care and encouragement....so all will see God living and acting in you and others. LIGHT THE FIRE OF ACTION.

Light the FIRE OF REVERENCE.

Reverence is the recognition of the sacred in each person. One of our RA values is Reverence of the Individual. We recognize God dwelling in each person and each person's unique gifts. Reverence extends to creating a home, a classroom and a community where all individuals are valued, appreciated and embraced for who they are. Each person is invited to be her or his best self in an environment where reverence is practiced. LIGHT THE FIRE OF REVERENCE.

LIGHT THE FIRE OF FAITH.

Each of us is on our own faith journey. Response-Ability is a program that welcomes people wherever they are on their journey of faith. We hope that you will feel welcome here to share the faith that you bring and that you will grow in your relationship with God throughout the year ahead. This year, you have each chosen to live in a faith community- where you will be invited to share prayer with each other, to discuss where you see God in your service experience and to take time to retreat and reflect. I find the most important thing for volunteers to do in order to grow in their faith is to take time for prayer and stay open.

One year, we had a volunteer who was not sure what she believed in terms of God and religion. She was not practicing any religion and not praying on her own. When she started with RA, she was open to spiritual growth but was unsure of what that would mean for her- I encouraged her to keep showing up for prayer and to remain open because God is always there inviting us- and will wait for us. Although at times it was a struggle for her to participate because she was unsure of her own beliefs, she was always present for community prayer nights and retreats. During a meditation on the Spring retreat of her second year, she really felt God's presence and she started to really pray authentically for the first time. Whenever she calls me now, she says she is praying for me and the RA program. Know that this alum and others are praying for you as you grow in your faith this year. Remember to show up for prayer and retreats because God is among us and waiting for our response to his or her invitation.

I now invite each community to come up when called to light their community candle which will serve as a reminder throughout the year to keep the fire of community burning and the light of Christ alive in your home.

When your service site is called, please come up and light your candle- then join hands in a circle for a blessing.

DR: We ask God's blessing on you as you join hands for the first time as a community. May you light the fire of community, education and faith in the DR this year.

DC: We ask God's blessing on you as you join hands for the first time as a community. May you light the fire of community, education and faith in DC this year.

LA: We ask God's blessing on you as you join hands for the first time as a community. May you light the fire of community, education and faith in LA this year.

PH: We ask God's blessing on you as you join hands for the first time as a community. May you light the fire of community, education and faith in PH this year.

Staff: We ask God's blessing on us as we joins hands as the RA Staff. May we light the fire of community, education and faith in the RA Program this year.

LIGHT THE FIRE OF COMMUNITY