

PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL  
PLAINVILLE, KANSAS  
MAY 20, 1966

COMMIT YOURSELF TO ACTION

IT IS, INDEED, A GREAT PRIVILEGE TO ADDRESS THE PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS OF 1966. FIRST LET ME ADD MY CONGRATULATIONS TO THE MULTITUDE OF CONGRATULATIONS ALREADY SHOWERED ON YOU. YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A MOST SIGNIFICANT PHASE OF YOUR EDUCATION. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENT. YOU, AND THOSE WHO HAVE TAUGHT YOU, AND YOUR PARENTS, WHO HAVE ENCOURAGED YOU AND HELPED YOU, CAN BE JUSTIFIABLY PROUD ON THIS OCCASION.

YOU HAVE THE BACKGROUND AND THE FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE IN OUR SOCIETY IN A MANNER THAT WILL BE A CREDIT TO THE COMMUNITY, THE FAMILY, AND OUR BUSINESS ECONOMY.

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ONE MIGHT SAY THAT ON THIS OCCASION YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN  
AN INHERITANCE BUT, I WOULD HASTEN TO ADD YOU MUST ULTIMATELY  
DETERMINE THE TRUE VALUE AND THE NATURE OF THIS INHERITANCE.

THE STORY HAS BEEN TOLD OF A RATHER UNUSUAL INHERITANCE.  
AN OLD LADY HAD FOR YEARS AROUSED THE CURIOSITY OF HER FAMILY  
REGARDING A MOST PRECIOUS FAMILY TREASURE - A LINCOLN LETTER.

NO ONE HAD EVER SEEN THE LINCOLN LETTER, BUT IT WAS WELL  
KNOWN THAT THE OLD GRANDMOTHER KEPT IT LOCKED IN A CERTAIN SMALL  
BLACK BOX. SHE SUBTLY USED THE LINCOLN LETTER WHEN SHE WAS  
OCCASIONALLY VEXED WITH A RELATIVE. SOMETIMES SHE WOULD THREATEN  
TO SELL IT TO A MUSEUM. SOMETIMES SHE WOULD OFFER TO WILL IT FIRST  
TO ONE MEMBER OF THE FAMILY, THEN ANOTHER.

AS THE CHILDREN GREW OLDER, THEIR INTEREST IN THE LINCOLN  
LETTER GREW SHARPER. STILL, NO ONE HAD EVER SEEN IT. BUT IT WAS  
THE FAMILY TREASURE.



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WHEN SHE DIED, SOME OF THE SADNESS WAS MITIGATED BY THE  
IDEA THAT NOW AT LAST, EVERYONE WOULD SEE THE LINCOLN LETTER.

THE LOCKED BOX WAS OPENED WITH CEREMONY. ANTICIPATION  
FILLED THE AIR. THEN, THERE IT WAS. ON TOP OF A PILE OF  
TRINKETS, THERE WAS THE LINCOLN LETTER.

BUT IT WAS NOT FROM LINCOLN. IT WAS TO LINCOLN, WRITTEN  
BY THEIR GRANDMOTHER IN 1863. IT WAS A CURIOUS COMPOSITE THING,  
FILLED WITH BITS OF ADVICE, BITS OF INFORMATION, SOME CRITICISM,  
A FEW POLITICAL OPINIONS, AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE FUTURE.

IT HAD NEVER BEEN MAILED BUT HAD BEEN SIMPLY KEPT ALL THOSE  
YEARS. IT WAS A WONDERFUL LEGACY - BUT OF NO DEFINITE MARKET  
VALUE. IT HAD ONLY A PERSONAL VALUE TO THE FAMILY.

TODAY YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR LEGACY; AND, LIKE THE LINCOLN  
LETTER, IT IS A CURIOUS COMPOSITE THING CONSISTING OF BITS OF  
ADVICE, BITS OF INFORMATION, SOME CRITICISM, OPINIONS, ENCOURAGEMENT

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FOR THE FUTURE, AND ALL THE OTHER PIECES THAT MAKE UP THE WHOLE  
OF A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION. YOU HAVE YOUR TREASURE, BUT LIKE  
THE LINCOLN LETTER, YOUR DIPLOMA IS NOT A THING OF DEFINITE VALUE  
IN AND OF ITSELF. IT HAS MAINLY PERSONAL VALUE.

YOU CAN LEAVE HERE TONIGHT WITH A CONFIDENT SENSE OF ACHIEVE-  
MENT AND THE SECURE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU ARE NOW HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES.  
BUT TOMORROW THE DAWN WILL BE NO DIFFERENT. THE OLD PATTERNS THAT  
YOU HAVE ALREADY ESTABLISHED WILL CONTINUE. YOUR TOOTHPASTE  
WILL TASTE THE SAME. THE MAIL WILL COME THROUGH. PLANES WILL  
FLY. TRAINS WILL RUN. BUSINESS WILL NOT STOP. LIFE WILL CONTINUE  
TO BEAT OUT ITS MEASURED CADENCE OF TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH.

BUT WHAT OF YOU? WHAT NOTICE WILL THE WORLD MAKE OF THE  
FACT THAT YOU NOW HAVE A LEGACY AND ARE NOW A HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE?

STATISTICALLY, THE FACT WILL BE DULY RECORDED.



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INDUSTRY, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENT, AND THE  
PROFESSIONS WILL NOTE YOUR ADVANCEMENT AND NEARLY ALL OF YOU  
WILL BE OFFERED A HOST OF OPPORTUNITIES.

IN A LARGER SENSE, HOWEVER, THE WORLD WILL NOT MOVE ONE BIT  
DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE YOU NOW HAVE A DIPLOMA. BEING A HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATE IS MERELY A STATE OF EXISTENCE FOR YOU, BUT, YOU SHOULD  
AND UNDOUBTEDLY DO UNDERSTAND THAT WHO YOU ARE, AND WHAT YOU BECOME,  
SILL DEPEND ON WHAT YOU DO.

A MAN SAID TO THE UNIVERSE, "SIR, I EXIST." "HOWEVER,"  
REPLIED THE UNIVERSE, "THAT FACT HAS NOT CREATED IN ME A SENSE OF  
OBLIGATION." THE WORLD IS NOT COMMITTED TO YOU. IT IS ANXIOUS,  
RATHER, FOR YOU TO COMMIT YOURSELVES TO IT. AND THE WORLD DARES  
TO HOPE, IN THIS RESPECT, THAT IN YOUR GENERATION THERE WILL BE  
SOME WHO WILL ACT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS THAT BESET MANKIND.

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OURS HAS BEEN CALLED THE AGE OF ANXIETY. WITH YOU, PERHAPS  
A NEW AGE CAN BE BORN ---- CALLED THE AGE OF COMMITMENT.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY WE HAVE BEEN COMMITTED TO TRUTH, BEAUTY,  
AND JUSTICE. BUT SINISTER FORCES HAVE OFTEN CONSPIRED TO INHIBIT  
THESE COMMITMENTS JUST SHORT OF ACTION AND NOW ~~AND~~ OTHER GRIM  
*MORE THAN EVER*  
*THREATEN*  
INGREDIENTS ~~TO~~ THIS COMMITMENT.

I WISH I COULD PEER INTO THE FUTURE AND ANNOUNCE TONIGHT  
THAT YOUR COMMITMENT WILL BE UNINTERRUPTED -- PARTICULARLY THE  
YOUNG MEN AMONG YOU --- THE TRUTH IS THAT THE WORLD IS IN A STATE  
OF CONFUSION --- THERE IS WAR AND STRIFE AROUND THE GLOBE AND YOUNG  
AMERICANS --- AGAIN AND AGAIN ARE PAYING THE PRICE FOR MAN'S  
INHUMANITY TO MAN.

JUST 2 DAYS AGO A HIGH ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL, (MR. MCNAMARA)  
SUGGESTED A UNIVERSAL MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAM WHICH COULD, IF



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IMPLEMENTED, REQUIRE 2 YEARS TRAINING FOR EVERY QUALIFIED YOUNG MAN AND WOMAN. THE PRESENT DRAFT SYSTEM IS, IN MY OPINION, GROSSLY INEQUITABLE --- THERE MUST BE A FAIRER WAY BUT I DOUBT COMPULSORY SERVICE IS THE ANSWER.

NOT WITHSTANDING THE AGONIZING CRISIS IN VIET NAM WHICH WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN YOUR FUTURES, I STILL FEEL THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR YOUR GENERATION. ALL OF HISTORY HAS BEEN A PRELUDE TO NOW - THE PRESENT. THE AGE OF COMMITMENT - COMMITMENT TO ACTION - CAN BEGIN TODAY.

SCIENCE HAS BROUGHT US NEW DISCOVERIES THAT MAKE THE ADVANCEMENT OF MANKIND MORE FEASIBLE THAN EVER BEFORE. WHILE THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOME OF THOSE DISCOVERIES ARE TERRIBLE, THE POSSIBILITIES ARE INSPIRING.

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AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY, WONDER DRUGS, NUCLEAR ENERGY, AND  
THE COMPUTER - THESE ALL MAKE POSSIBLE A WORLD IN WHICH THERE IS  
FOOD AND CARE ENOUGH FOR A RICHER PHYSICAL EXISTENCE - FREE TIME  
ENOUGH FOR A RICHER CULTURAL EXISTENCE.

EDUCATION AND MODERN COMMUNICATIONS HAVE GIVEN US NEW POWERS  
THAT CAN BE USED TO PERSUADE AND ENLIGHTEN ALL PEOPLES SO THAT THEY  
MAY UNDERSTAND AND STRIVE TOWARD A BETTER LIFE. OUR SATELLITE  
PROGRAM GIVES PROMISE THAT SOME DAY THE WORLD WILL BE DEDICATED TO  
MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

I COULD GO ON AND LIST ENDLESSLY THE MANY DEVICES OF CIVILI-  
ZATION THAT OFFER YOU LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMIT YOURSELF TO  
ACTION. BUT IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT THAT YOU SIMPLY AVAIL YOURSELVES  
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ADVANTAGES THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN CREATED  
BY PREVIOUS GENERATIONS. IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT THAT YOU MERELY SIT  
BACK AND MAKE VALUE JUDGEMENTS ABOUT THE EMERGING PATTERNS OF SOCIETY.



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IT IS WHAT YOU DO WITH THE ADVANTAGES - IT IS WHAT YOU DO  
TO RESHAPE THE PATTERNS - THAT MATTERS. IT IS THE KIND OF COMMIT-  
MENT YOU NOW MAKE THAT WILL DETERMINE HOW THE WORLD WILL REGARD YOU.

THIS MEANS THAT YOU MUST EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS AND ABILITIES  
THAT YOU HAVE BEGUN HERE IN HIGH SCHOOL TOWARD A COMPLETE EXISTENCE  
WHEREIN THE LIFE OF THE MIND CONTINUES CONTEMPLATING, WEIGHING, AND  
REEXAMINING IN ORDER TO DETERMINE A MEANINGFUL COURSE OF ACTION. THIS  
MENAS THAT YOU HAVE TO EVALUATE SO THAT YOU CAN MAKE AN INTELLIGENT  
COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE; AN INTELLIGENT COMMITMENT TO ACTION.

FROM WHAT I HAVE BEEN READING IN THE PAPERS, YOUR GENERATION  
HAS ALREADY MADE CERTAIN COMMITMENTS. YOU HAVE GIVEN AN UNSATIS-  
FACTORY RATING TO MUCH OF WHAT YOU HAVE FOUND IN THE WORLD.

YOUR GENERATION WILL HAVE TO PASS JUDGMENT ON OUR ETHICS, OUR  
MORALS, AND OUR PATRIOTISM. BUT IN ORDER TO HAVE YOUR COMMITMENTS  
MEAN ANYTHING YOU WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT A PLAN OF ACTION.

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WHEN ONE TEARS DOWN OLD STANDARDS, ONE MUST REPLACE THEM  
WITH SOMETHING BETTER. YOU MUST REPLACE THEM WITH SOMETHING OF  
VALUE.

YOU HAVE COME TO MATURITY IN A DAY AND AGE WHEN MATERIAL  
COMFORTS HAVE BEEN COMMONPLACE - IN A TIME WHEN WE ARE THE RICHEST,  
MOST POWERFUL NATION THAT HAS EVER BEEN ON EARTH. YOU HAVE GROWN  
UP IN A CENTURY WHEN THE VALUE OF LIFE AND THE DIGNITY OF THE  
INDIVIDUAL HAVE RECEIVED MORE THAN TOKEN RESPECT. PERHAPS ALL THIS  
HAS PERMITTED YOU TO DREAM LOFTIER DREAMS. I HOPE SO.

I HOPE, TOO, THAT YOU ARE PREPARED TO FIND THE WAYS AND THE  
MEANS TO BRING ABOUT THE GREAT MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CHANGES THAT YOU  
HAVE BEEN DEMANDING. THOROUGH EVALUATION AND SUBSEQUENT COMMITMENT  
TO ACTION ARE NOT EASY. AS A CHILD, YOUR DUTY IN LIFE WAS TO LOOK  
AND LEARN.



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DR. SEUSS, THE CHILDREN'S AUTHOR, HAS SAID, AND I QUOTE:

"WHEN I LEAVE HOME TO WALK TO SCHOOL,  
DAD ALWAYS SAYS TO ME,  
MARCO, KEEP YOUR EYELIDS UP,  
AND SEE WHAT YOU CAN SEE."

GOOD ADVICE. THAT IS ALL A CHILD NEED DO.

AS YOU ENTERED ADOLESCENCE, THAT MARVELOUS TIME OF FANTASY  
WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY, YOUR DUTY IN LIFE BECAME INFINITELY MORE  
COMPLEX. YOU HAD TO KEEP YOUR EYELIDS UP AND YOU ALSO HAD TO EVALUATE  
WHAT WAS WORTHWHILE AND WHAT WAS NOT.

THE EVALUATING GOES ON FOR THE REST OF LIFE. SOMETIMES IT  
IS SIMPLY EXERCISING SELECTIVITY. THERE IS SO MUCH TO SEE, SO MUCH  
TO LEARN, SO MUCH TO JUDGE, THAT BEING SELECTIVE IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT.

TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, DURING YOUR ADOLESCENT YEARS, UNDER A  
PRESCRIBED CURRICULUM, SOMEONE ELSE HAS TAKEN LIFE AND HAS DONE SOME  
OF THE SELECTING AND SOME OF THE EVALUATING FOR YOU \_ AS THE EDITORS  
OF A MAGAZINE DO. BUT NOW, WITH MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE MATURITY, YOUR

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DUTIES ARE AWESOME. YOU MUST STILL KEEP YOUR EYELIDS UP, YOU MUST  
JUDGE, SELECT, EVALUATE - ALL ON YOUR OWN. AND THEN, BASED ON  
WHAT YOU SEE AND BASED ON HOW YOU JUDGE, YOU COMMIT YOURSELF  
PERSONALLY TO RESPONSIBLE ACTION.

IN WHAT AREAS HAVE YOU ALREADY RENDERED JUDGMENTS?

I ASSUME THAT YOU HAVE MADE JUDGMENTS REGARDING GOVERNMENT.

WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO ABOUT IT?

I ASSUME THAT YOU HAVE MADE CERTAIN JUDGMENTS REGARDING BUSINESS  
AND INDUSTRY.

WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO ABOUT IT?

I ASSUME YOU HAVE MADE CERTAIN JUDGMENTS ABOUT FURTHER EDUCATION.

WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO ABOUT IT?

I ASSUME YOU HAVE MADE JUDGMENTS REGARDING MANY THINGS - FROM  
POP ART AND THE NEW YORK METS - TO A DEEP-FELT CONCERN FOR OTHER HUMAN  
BEINGS.



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WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO?

AS A STARTING COURSE OF ACTION, MAY I SUGGEST THAT YOU PARTICIPATE. OFTEN WE HEAR PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT AS SOME SORT OF OUTSIDE FORCE OVER WHICH WE HAVE NO CONTROL. IT IS A THRID PERSON - A "THEY." INDUSTRY, TOO, OFTEN IS REFERRED TO AS "THEY." THERE IS, I THINK, A KIND OF MYTH IN CIRCULATION THAT SOME SORT OF ESTABLISHMENT IS RUNNING EVERYTHING. THIS SIMPLY IS NOT TRUE.

"WE" ARE THE GOVERNMENT. "WE" CAN BE INDUSTRY. "WE" RUN THINGS AND, IF WE SO CHOOSE, WE CAN MAKE THEM BETTER.

POLITICAL PARTIES ARE NOT CLOSED. THEY ARE WIDE OPEN. BUT IF YOU WANT TO HAVE A PART IN YOUR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, START BY PROVING YOUR MERIT TO THE LOCAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION.

YOUR COMMUNITY IS ANXIOUS FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TIME AND  
WILL NEED  
EFFORT. SCHOOLS YOUR ASSISTANCE. ALL OF LIFE, IN FACT, IS AN  
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OPEN SHOP - READY AND WILLING TO WELCOME EVERY ACTIVE WORKER WHO  
IS WILLING TO PROVE HIS WORTH.

THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT ARE WRONG AND UNJUST. TO RIGHT  
THESE WRONGS, YOU MUST BE IN A PARTICIPATING POSITION, UTILIZING  
EXISTING CHANNELS TO HELP REROUTE THE COURSE OF HISTORY. I RECOMMEND  
EXISTING CHANNELS, AS OPPOSED TO REVOLUTION, BECAUSE WE DO NOT WANT  
TO LOSE THE GOOD THINGS THAT WE HAVE.

I DO NOT MEAN THAT YOU SHOULD BE BOUND BY ANY SET OF RIGID  
BLUE-PRINTS. NOR ARE THERE ANY SET, ESTABLISHED VISIONS THAT YOU  
MUST ASPIRE TOWARD. BUT I SAY USE THAT WHICH NOW EXISTS IN ORDER  
TO BUILD AN EVEN GREATER FUTURE.

MANY MODERN AMERICANS SEEM TO HAVE A TERRIBLE FEAR OF CON-  
FORMING TO ESTABLISHED PATTERNS. CRUSADERS OFTEN SEEM TO FEEL THAT  
THEY MUST WORK OUTSIDE OF SOCIETY RATHER THAN WITHIN IT. IT IS THE  
TOTAL YOU HAVE TO CONCERN YOURSELF WITH. IN ORDER TO DO SO, YOU



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MUST BE IMMERSSED IN THE TOTALITY OF THINGS - THINKING, EVALUATING,  
AND ACTING IN THE WORLD - NOT OUTSIDE OF IT. INSIDE OF, AND AS A  
PART OF OUR FUNCTIONING, CHANGING SOCIETY - THERE YOU WILL FIND  
RECOGNITION, AND THERE YOU CAN CREATE THE BETTER TOMORROW THAT YOU  
WANT.

IN THIS FREE AND GREAT LAND OF OPPORTUNITY YOU CAN BE  
SUCCESSFUL IN WHATEVER YOUR UNDERTAKING. GREAT SUCCESS IS WITHIN  
YOUR POWER AND GRASP, BUT ONLY YOU CAN DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. IF YOU  
WILL LIVE UNDER THE GUIDING HAND OF GOD; IF YOU LEARN TO APPLY  
WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW, TO DEVELOP A RICH, VARIED BACKGROUND THAT CAN  
BE TAPPED FOR IDEAS; IF YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CREATE ALTERNATIVES  
OR DEVELOP SOLUTIONS; IF YOU CAN BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO "SPIN AROUND  
ON A DIME" TO MEET CHALLENGES; IF YOU KEEP ATTUNED WITH JOB AND  
PERSONAL ENVIRONMENT, MAKING IT POSSIBLE TO FORESEE AND SOLVE  
PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY BECOME SERIOUS; IF YOU DEVELOP AN EAGERNESS

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FOR INFORMATION, AN ABILITY TO CREATE WHAT WILL BECOME ACCEPTABLE;  
IF YOU CAN GENERATE A SINCERE BELIEF IN YOURSELF AND THE COURAGE  
TO WITHSTAND GROUP PRESSURES, WHETHER SOCIAL, POLITICAL, OR BUSINESS;  
IF YOU CAN KEEP FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND THE CONFIDENCE TO BREAK AWAY  
FROM TRADITIONAL VIEWPOINTS - YOUR SUCCESS IS ASSURED.

AT DAWN TOMORROW, NOTHING WILL CHANGE BECAUSE YOU ARE A  
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE, EXCEPT AS YOU MAKE IT CHANGE. THE FUTURE  
CAN BE YOURS TO SHAPE AND MOLD ACCORDING TO YOUR HIGHEST HOPES AND  
HEAVEN INSPIRED DREAMS, OR YOU MAY SIT BACK AND ALLOW DESTINY TO  
PASS YOU BY.

<sup>To</sup>  
BUT ~~ON~~ JUSTIFY YOUR BRIEF STAY ON THIS PLANET, YOU MUST  
COMMIT YOURSELF TO ACTION - ACTION THAT WILL IMPROVE THE LOT OF MAN.

GOD HAS LIFTED MAN ABOVE THE ANIMALS TO WALK UPON THE EARTH  
AND REFLECT THE GLORY OF THE ALMIGHTY IN WORD AND THOUGHT AND DEED.



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THE ELEPHANT IS LARGER THAN MAN. THE BUTTERFLY IS MORE BEAUTIFUL,  
AND THE MOSQUITO IS MORE PROLIFIC. BUT ONLY MAN CAN ACT WITH REASON.  
ONLY MAN CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST,  
WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE, WHATSOEVER  
THINGS ARE LOVELY, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT .... THINK  
ON THESE THINGS."

MAY YOU THINK AND ACT ON THESE THINGS AND GO FORTH AND  
COMMIT YOURSELF TO ACTION.

CONGRATULATIONS, GOOD LUCK, AND GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU!