

Two married couples study, graduate together

HOUGHTON – Completing their college education became a top family priority for two married couples – both with children – who studied side by side for 16 months to earn their bachelor's degrees, conferred at Houghton College this past weekend.

Marlene Buffamonte-Feind and Scott Feind of Lockport and Lauri and Mark Wierzbicki of Orchard Park juggled jobs, home and homework assignments to finish Houghton's adult degree-completion course of study called P.A.C.E., the Program for Accelerating College Education.

The two couples joined 46 other graduates to walk across Houghton's Wesley Chapel stage to the applause of hundreds family members and friends.

In addressing the graduates, President Mullen said, "You deserve sincere congratulations for pursuing the completion of your degrees at a very demanding time in your lives. But just as deserving are your family members and supporters who 'gave you up' for the hours it took to finish a relevant program that will now help you as you seek to achieve greater things."

Dr. Mullen noted that their studies were "intentional" and not the normal course of action for employed adults.

"Many people see college as an extension of a young person's educational journey, sort of an expected passage into life. But for you, it was an intentional, not an expected, step. It was hard work you choose to do because you wanted to achieve."

In delivering the commencement address, Dr. Ronald Mahurin, Houghton College vice president for Academic Affairs, spoke of the certainty that graduates will encounter "interruptions" in life as time progresses. Studying for a bachelor's degree as an adult may have been one of them, he noted. Dr. Mahurin quoted the famous British theologian C.S. Lewis as saying that "... interruptions are real life, the real life that God sends us day by day ..."

"What would your life's work, your relationships with your family, your community, your faith community look like if you consciously determine to embrace the interruptions of life?" he asked.

Dr. Mahurin encouraged P.A.C.E. graduates to be sensitive to life's interruptions, which he described as "a child who needs love and attention, an illness of a family member, a neighborhood that needs leadership, a faith community that seems to need what only you can give."

These situations can

occur in professional endeavors as well, he noted.

"Many of you have or will have management and personnel responsibilities in the workplace. To be effective, you must learn to live with the ambiguities and the 'interruptions' which are common to the workplace."

It is these unplanned or unanticipated occasions in an otherwise focused life that can provide clear meaning and direction, Dr. Mahurin said. He urged graduates to allow interruptions to drive a 're-imagining' of what might be possible in the future.

The April 2009 graduates became the 32nd graduating class from P.A.C.E., an alternative route to a bachelor's degree that Houghton College began in 1991. P.A.C.E. is open to adult learners whose college studies were interrupted.

By studying weekday evenings (and some Saturdays) in classrooms near to them – in West Seneca, Olean, Arcade, Jamestown, Dansville or Clarence – adult learners earn an undergraduate degree that is fully accredited by the New York State Board of Regents. To date, Houghton has graduated 104 cohorts, or groups, of P.A.C.E. students totaling 1,186 individuals.

For more information on P.A.C.E., visit <http://campus.houghton.edu/orgs/pace/>.



Photo submitted

Houghton College's Program for Accelerating College Education graduates Marlene Buffamonte-Feind and Scott Feind, and Lauri and Mark Wierzbicki stand with Houghton College President Shirley Mullen (center).