

FOUNDERS' DAY 2018
HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY, Beirut
Monday, October 15, 2018

President's Word

Excellencies, Dr. Zoghbi, colleagues, and students,

We celebrate Founders' Day with 63 years in our past.

It is a noble task for an institution to be reminded of its foundations.

The simplified version goes this way:

Once there were millions of people in their land not far from here, and they lived in educational abundance, including dozens of good American colleges where mostly Armenian, but also Greek and Syriac youth studied. One was called Euphrates, another Aintab, another Tarsus, and another Adana American College for Girls. But then, a hundred years ago, bad things happened. Most people were no more alive or no more in town, and the colleges closed or changed. Some people who cherished the past, wanted a new college in a new country. The country was Lebanon, and the College was Haigazian.

But what did Haigazian mean? It was a person, whose first name was Armenag, an American-educated prominent leader/theologian/educator who was among those who had also died. Thirty years later, his family in the USA, mainly Stephen and Mary, wanted him to be remembered positively, so they made a donation to the Armenian Missionary Association of America where they knew another Stephen, and with the Armenian Evangelical Church in Lebanon, they started Haigazian University.

Dear students, I wish things were as smooth as I put them. Everything was more complicated than this, you know. But the lessons are the same, whether we tell them in a simple or intricate fashion. Lessons: there is evil in this world, there is goodness in this world. They coexist simultaneously. But only one can win.

One reason the good wins, is in a profound understanding of a notion called SERVICE, because in service, the focus is on the other.

After this ceremony today, we are going to inaugurate the renovated Stephen Philibosian Student Center, especially its new Cafeteria. That very first building of Haigazian was called in the 1930s and 40s the WEBB House, where an American congregational missionary named Elizabeth Webb housed and educated Armenian girls. Elizabeth had been a longtime teacher and social worker in Adana, and had witnessed all sorts of atrocities in the Adana massacres of 1909, and after the Armenian Genocide had moved to Beirut to help a displaced and stricken people stand on their feet again. She was here to serve in one of the most efficient ways possible that is called education. In our new Cafeteria, there is a special wall in her memory. I invite you to go and read it and be inspired by it.

So, in 1955, Haigazian was born in a building with a heart, in a city with a good heart. In the same legacy, Haigazian University knew that we should be a university with a heart. This is evident in many ways, I hope, student life, classroom dynamics, financial aid, understanding of mission, and general atmosphere, but for today, I would like to simply acknowledge a Student Club on our campus that represents a hearty service to the needy, and I will invite its student members to stand: they are the *Desert Streams Club*.

As one-third of our students are in a service type of major, whether Social Work, Special Education, Counseling or other, I would like you, dear students, to remember that your vocation is not simply to see where your skills and interests are, but mainly where the humans are in dire need, and to then capably address those needs.

In the logo of Haigazian University you read the motto that says, Truth, Freedom, Service. But in the shield, and in Arabic script it also says “Serving Lebanon” خدمة لبنان

Haigazian University stands in the service of and includes all, as good education and appropriate service, if combined, change societies into the better. Remember that getting the best education and giving the best service unto others will keep all hope alive in the future of Lebanon and the world, as educated goodness and selfless love will never fail.

So, GET EDUCATED, and LEARN TO SERVE. GET EDUCATED, and LEARN TO SERVE.

It is no coincidence today, that we are honored by the presence of a guest speaker who is the president of an organization that symbolizes one of the utmost services to humanity, including Lebanon. And they too have their headquarters near us, in the heart of Beirut, on Spears Street.

By having Dr. Antoine Zoghbi, the President of the Lebanese Red Cross, with us today, we are honoring the matchless service and value system the Red Cross continues to signify all around us, and Dr. Zoghbi would be the best representative of service we could think of for our Founders' Day.