

# Plus Ultra

His Excellency the Most Honorable **Sir Patrick L. Allen** (BA '85, MA '86, PhD '98), governor-general of Jamaica  
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I am deeply honored to be here today, to accept this honorary degree, which has just been conferred on me...receiving this distinguished recognition definitely ranks as one of the highest points of my life...We have been so warmly and graciously welcomed back here and this is a memorable occasion not only for me, but for my entire family. Our family are full-fledged members of the Andrews Community. My wife graduated from Andrews, two of my children graduated from Andrews, and all three attended at one time or another. So you see, we can go nowhere without wearing the banner of Andrews University.

Let me take the opportunity to congratulate the class for realizing the value of Christian education offered by this institution and firmly grasping the opportunities presented. You have now etched your names in the strong pillars that form the 136-year legacy of one of the world's finest SDA institutions. I have very vivid memories of the plethora of emotions that I experienced as I sat some 25 years ago in the same place where you are now sitting...Today I stand here with a new set of emotions, which can be summed up in the expression, "What hath God wrought?"

We have all come to this moment in our lives having followed different pathways, life experiences and encounters with destiny. As graduates, you each have come today with a narrative as distinctive as your features. You have come with future plans as diverse as the degrees soon to be conferred. While for each of you this moment represents a significant step on the ladder of your dreams, it is also foundational to your future accomplishments.

...I grew up in a deep rural village in Jamaica, the fourth of five children born to a poor farmer and his wife, both of whom were devout Christians

and Adventists...I was raised to discern the inextricable connectedness of compassion, integrity and service, which discipline assisted in making me a lifelong learner. The values that were instilled in me by my parents and my teachers are the constants in my life. These have helped me to navigate changing scenes, and circumstances and positions, and to adapt without compromising. I learned from my humble beginnings the value of prudent choices and a strong work ethic. I also learned along the way that based on my moral values, that doing the right thing regardless of the consequences is the right thing to do...As I emerged into adulthood and my professional life, I grasped every educational opportunity, whether it was working as a schoolteacher, a church pastor, a conference administrator, or working various jobs at Andrews University. The cold nights at the security gatehouse, the student center, or better yet—the cafeteria dishroom, or in the records office as an assistant registrar, I treated each experience as an opportunity to serve, improve my life, and make a difference in the lives of others. Each

assignment was the one to which I had been called, and so I continually gave my best and moved to the next assignment when it was offered, continuing the journey.

...I still recall when the Prime Minister asked me if I would be the Governor-General. My first reaction to this astonishing request was, "But I'm a pastor!" Without missing a beat, his response was persuasively unequivocal: "You now have an opportunity to pastor a nation." When put in that manner, it was impossible for me to refuse such a challenge, primarily since it is not a political office and the nominee has to be appointed by her Majesty the Queen. On Feb. 26, 2009, I was installed as the sixth Governor-General of Independent Jamaica. That event was a milestone, another defining moment in my life...So it was that step by step, brick by brick, God brought me to the place I now occupy...

But I must get back to the matter at hand, that is specifically the Latin phrase "Plus Ultra." On the legendary twin pillars of Hercules, located at the end of the Straits of Gibraltar, it is said that the Latin words "Ne Plus Ultra," which means "Nothing Further



Beyond,” were written. According to mythology, this served as a warning to sailors and adventurers to go no further, as they would venture into the perilous unknown. Plus Ultra has become a most common expression for motivation and institutions...But it was Charles V of Spain who was the first to use the words Plus Ultra. He deleted the forbidding negative word, “Ne” from the inscription. This bold act redefined the phrase to mean, “thus far and further.” By this act, he encouraged persons to ignore the ancient warning, take some risks, go further beyond. This began a new era of unlimited exploration, discovery and achievements. There’s an expression, “Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for his children.” I’m sure each of you has heard this declaration in at least one of your classes here at Andrews. This phrase, Plus Ultra, also reaffirms that the only limits on human achievement are self-imposed.

Graduates, you came to Andrews seeking to create your own life experiences, needing something better, needing to go further, seeking to experience your Plus Ultra. Now you are leaving. You are leaving with status and standing to enable you to build a good life. Let me state emphatically and confidently that you are the best that God could find at this time to build a world of peace, love and harmony...You have achieved knowledge, affirmed faith and now you’re in my opinion at the most critical phase—it is time to go change the world. What will be your plus ultra moment in this process? The knowledge that you acquired at Andrews University now needs to be translated into expression that will impact the lives of people. This is a summum bonum for existence here on earth. We are here to serve each other.

The Right Excellent Isaiah Marcus Garver, Jamaica’s First National hero, said, “Be learned in all that is worthwhile knowing. Not to be crammed with subject matter of the book, or philosophy of the classroom, but to store away daily such facts as you need in application of life, so that you may the better in all things understand your fellow man and interpret your relationship with God. I think I heard that expression some 2000 years before, when the Scriptures say, “the most important thing for you to do is to

love your neighbor, love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.” So it is in this moment, as you contemplate the future, that you make a commitment to further your decision to serve...Will you be one of the leaders, or one who is continually led? Will you choose to be among those who are victors, or those who are victims? Or winners, and not those who are whiners. For as long as the earth remains, and as long as there is people on earth, we must constantly seek to go further. Not in a downward spiral towards calamity, but towards the positive transformation of our existence. Life is saturated with stories of individuals who have defied the norms and gone further, individuals stretching the nerve to do better, to do something more...Among this group sitting here today, you may not readily have the answer, but you may be the ones to produce the simple solutions to what may seem like life’s greatest enigmas. Which one of you will make the breakthrough to something that is beneficial to humanity, such as finding the cure for cancer or the HIV and AIDS virus? Who among you will find a way of delivering basic services to billions of needy persons in the underdeveloped countries of the world? Which one of you will simplify complex theories and concepts and activities so that ordinary people can understand, and can access services such as the Internet and others? Will one of you be like the Cuban doctor Carlos Finley and his colleagues who discovered the cause of yellow fever? Or yet Samuel Morse, who in 1844, that interesting year, transmitted his first coded message via the telegraph? Do we have some Archimedes in our midst, who finally got a grasp of his principle of buoyancy, and ran out shrieking, “Eureka! I have found it!” We will be waiting to hear another Archimedes. When sailors realized they wouldn’t really fall off the edge of the earth, they pressed on to new discoveries. Martin Luther, after years of flagellating himself and climbing steps in his earnest attempt to be right with God, one day heard a voice saying, “The just shall live by faith.” He found peace in his soul. And Martin Luther King, when he stood triumphantly on the Lincoln Memorial and said, “I have a dream that one day” and also, “I have seen the promised



land and I won’t turn back”—all of these were Plus Ultra moments. But as you appreciate the achievements and discoveries of the past, you yourselves must do what others never dared to do. You must step outside of the status quo, outside of your comfort zone, and go further with your values as the basis of your decisions. There’s an excerpt in the *New York Times* magazine entitled “Chances of Great Discoveries” and I quote for you. I hope you’ll find it.

“It is a curious fact that some of the greatest human achievements have been by chance. Many among the most important discoveries in the history of mankind have been made by men who were not seeking the great truth they found. Science is the result not only of study, but of precious accidents. And this is true of the deeds told of in history. It is an interesting study in itself the influence which happy blunders and unintended happenings have had on civilization. In exploration, accident has played its important part as an invention. Exploration intended or involuntary has achieved great results not only as civilization, but in doing so has scored some of the highest feats of human heroism.” This article was

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