



## Personal Reflections

2/1/2017

Dear IMSA Family,

Happy (belated) New Year! I appreciate that many of you share with me that you read and enjoy these personal reflections. I want to reiterate that these are my “personal” reflections. At times, it’s difficult to judge how much of my heart I want to open up via this medium and the level of risk that I can take in “reflecting” on what is occurring at IMSA and beyond. However, today I want to lean toward sharing more than I “ought to” in the spirit of communicating with “family.”

At the National level, President Trump in 2017 has created a lot of buzz. Wherever you stand on these political issues, and we have all kinds of views in the IMSA family, I encourage you to engage with each other, wrestle with the right and the left, listen with the intent to understand rather than respond, and however difficult, hold on to multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Personally, I often feel constrained to share my personal views on some of these controversial issues given my position as President of IMSA. However, at our recent Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration, alum Shawon Jackson ’11 reminded us of Dr. King’s words that “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” Shawon reminded us that this arc doesn’t bend automatically or perfectly. You and I have to do our part so that we help to bend it toward justice. Additionally, over the past few days, the words of Martin Niemöller, the Protestant pastor best remembered for the following quotation, continue to ring between my ears,

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out-  
Because I was not a Socialist.  
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out-  
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out-  
Because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for me-and there was no one left to speak for me.*

IMSA was founded to provide an opportunity for accelerated learning for all Illinois students. I don’t know how many students at IMSA are from any of the seven countries included in the January 27, 2017 President’s Executive Order, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” but even if we only had one student, or even if we had none, from any of these countries, should we not speak out on his/her behalf? Whether or not we have students currently on campus, or have had them from any of these countries: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, it seems to me that our Founder, Dr. Leon



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Lederman's statement on "Enrolling in Our Possibilities," which I often quote should guide our philosophy: "If we do what we know and feel is right, it is bound to happen...Our philosophy will be to treat our charges as if each one is capable of this extraordinary achievement." Regardless of country of origin, all are capable (and welcome) at IMSA!

At the state level, our elected officials continue a principled debate regarding budgets and government transformation. The latest action taken by Attorney General Lisa Madigan was to request that the St. Clair County Circuit Court vacate their order that has allowed Illinois state employees, such as all of us at IMSA, to be paid in the absence of a budget. The earliest that this order would impact us at the Academy is February 28, 2017. Beyond these facts, there is nothing else that we know for certain, but you can be sure that we're already planning for contingencies.

I can share my opinions about this and my feelings of frustration, but these will be in vain given that we simply don't have more information. My approach to this is to focus on what I can influence rather than focus on my concerns. Those of you familiar with Stephen Covey's outstanding book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, will remember what he calls the Circle of Influence and the Circle of Concern. Covey postulates that proactive people work on areas in their life that they can influence, such their own attitudes, relationships, tasks, while reactive people focus on areas that they have little to no power to control, such as state budget, national conflicts, the weather. I commit myself to you that as soon as we have more information, we will update you, our IMSA family. In the meantime, let's continue to focus on those things that we have control over. Let's continue to do what we do best every day. At the campus level, upon return from winter break, students participated in a wide variety of Intersession workshops and learning opportunities. IMSA also held a hackathon, "Get the Lead Out," in partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Health and six other local high schools. Senior auction just ended and raised funds for prom and end of the year activities. I can also inform you that I've spoken to several seniors lately who shared with me that they are suffering from "senioritis" for months now. Finally, I can't wait to celebrate Lunar Year activities this week. Students have worked hard on their skits and dances. Come out and cheer them on!

Respectfully,  
José M. Torres, PhD  
President