

In March, we all had our universe rocked by the events in Blacksburg and I know our Brothers in Zeta Beta and everyone at Virginia Tech are foremost in all our minds.

For me, it is very hard to reconcile such a tragedy with my view of the world. I am not so naïve as to be surprised that bad things happen or that some things defy explanation or understanding. But, my Alpha Phi Omega experience greatly colors how I see the world and, at a time like this, I find great comfort in the Fraternity.

We have proven it time and again – when the need is the greatest, APOers stand the tallest. We are good in a crisis. We respond with compassion and action. We send our thoughts and wishes but we also mobilize to make the situation better.

It is unfortunate that we have had so many opportunities to prove this point but I am so proud of the way Brothers, individually and as chapters and sections, commit to being part of the solution.

After the September 11th attack, many chapters sent people to Ground Zero to help with search and rescue. Other chapters conducted blood drives, collected supplies and raised money.

After Katrina hit, student and alumni Brothers from all over the country went to Mississippi and New Orleans to help. Chapters arranged alternative spring breaks in the devastated areas. Again, chapters held blood drives, food and clothing drives and fund raising events.

When the going gets tough, Alpha Phi Omega Brothers don't just get going; they lead the way. We don't just lament the problem; we become part of the solution. In many cases, we even help develop the solutions.

And that is the spirit I celebrate with you now. I understand that it is difficult to think about celebrating anything in the shadow of recent events. However, I think it is important to not let the bad things that happen around us define how we view the world. Every time a tragedy occurs, we need to stand up and strike a blow for the positive. We need to show that the bad guys, be they terrorists, floods or troubled individuals, do NOT get to win.

The human spirit is an amazing thing. It sustains us during the most challenging of times. It helps us to rise above a world that includes bad things. Alpha Phi Omega embodies that spirit.

As soon as the news of the Blacksburg tragedy broke, Brothers began thinking of ways to help, to show support for the Virginia Tech chapter and community. It happened organically, without any prompting or direction. The second impulse was organizing. Chapters started sharing their ideas and plans, collaborating with other Brothers to enhance the impact. This is what Alpha Phi Omega does, naturally.

And that is one of the advantages of belonging to a National Service Fraternity. You have resources far beyond your campus. You have access to more information and a broader perspective of the world. You have Brothers to collaborate with all over the country, people to care about and who care about you, even if you haven't met each other.

The resulting blood drives, fund raisers, pictures, cards and bed sheets won't change what happened but they represent the desire to be part of the solution, to show that we all care about our Brothers from Zeta Beta.

Alpha Phi Omega is a safe place. And yet, as recent events have shown us, no one is ever truly safe. We do not live in a bubble either on our campuses or within the Fraternity. The real world intrudes on a regular basis, though generally less overwhelmingly than in Blacksburg. While no place is ever guaranteed safe, the need for a port in a storm is greater than ever and, at its best, Alpha Phi Omega, provides that port.

As a student, Alpha Phi Omega provided me with a place to belong within a large university far away from all that was familiar. Alpha Phi Omega provided me with a place to learn, giving me experience in leadership, public speaking and many other valuable skills that continue to serve me well. And Alpha Phi Omega gave me the chance to do something worthwhile, contributing to the world around me. Today, Alpha Phi Omega continues to be a huge part of my support system, a family beyond those with whom I share DNA.

Our Brothers at Virginia Tech live by the motto *Ut Prosim, That I May Serve*. But this is not something that we came to recently. Alpha Phi Omega has been committed to serving since 1925. So, in that spirit, I challenge you to maintain your positive attitude, your desire to make a difference. Make sure that you are part of the solution, always. Continue to provide Leadership, Friendship and Service for that is the antidote to the ills of the world.

As college students, you often hear that you are the future. I would submit that the future is today. While, certainly, you will accomplish great things in the years to come, you are doing great things now. From Relay for Life to Kids Carnival to Teeter for Tots to Campus Escorts, you are making the world a significantly better place every day.

Keep up the good work.