

# Commencement May 2014

On behalf of Bellarmine University's Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and alumni, congratulations on earning your Bellarmine degrees, and welcome to the distinguished international association of more than 22,000 of your fellow alumni and alumnae throughout the world!

Congratulations also to today's honorary degree recipient, Dr. Roger Rosenblatt. Roger, you have been a good friend both to me and to Bellarmine University. But don't think this means for one second that I will take it easy on you the next time we meet on the bocce court.

I had hoped, of course, to be delivering these Commencement remarks in the Owsley Brown Frazier Stadium on Clayton Field. Trappist monk Thomas Merton, whose writings and philosophies are so important to us here at Bellarmine University, once wrote in his journal: "I myself am part of the weather and part of the climate and part of the place ... It is certainly part of my life of prayer."

To be perfectly transparent, I myself have engaged in some weather-related prayer this past week. Unfortunately, the weather decided not to cooperate with us today.

I apologize to those of you who had planned to bring more than four guests with you today. We know that your parents and grandparents and siblings and friends are just as proud of you as we are. I hope that some of them are watching the livestream of today's exercises in Frazier or Cralle Halls, or on the Bellarmine website. A video of the entire ceremony will also be posted on the website afterward, so that you can share the ceremony with those who couldn't be here.

Today, 553 of you graduate from Bellarmine University with a combined total of 560 undergraduate and graduate degrees and head out into the world to share your knowledge, your values and your talents.

The Class of 2014 is a group of exceptional quality and character. Among you are the first three students to graduate from Bellarmine with degrees from our new School of Environmental Studies: Leigha Gad, Lucas Graham, and Jena Patterson; and the first-ever Dan R. Ison Endowed Communication Scholar: Marissa Leese.

Matthew Tewell, who is graduating today, is NOT earning the first Bellarmine degree in his family. He is earning the Tewell family's 18<sup>th</sup> Bellarmine degree. In fact, there has been a member of the Tewell family on this campus for a remarkable 37 of the past 51 years.

Finally, Ajla Hakalovic graduates today with a major in Political Science and a minor in Criminal Justice. Ajla and her parents escaped from war-torn Bosnia when she was 2 ½ years old after narrowly surviving the bombing of their apartment building and placement in a Croatian concentration camp. Ajla plans to attend law school, writing in

her application that “studying law is the opportunity to search for possible truths and to establish and maintain a sense of order and justice in a society.”

I can’t think of a better testament to Bellarmine University’s mission statement: that Bellarmine “seeks to benefit the public interest, to help create the future, and to improve the human condition.”

Congratulations to all of these fine young men and women, and indeed to everyone graduating today. Each of you has taken a unique and compelling journey to this significant moment in your lives, and we are very proud of each of you. Give yourselves a hand, Class of 2014!

You have each worked hard to complete your coursework and earn your respective degrees. Today is a moment to stop and celebrate your accomplishments. But it is also the launching point of the next part of your life – the part where you take the knowledge, the values, the talents and the skills that you possess and apply them to the challenges of the real world. And there *will* be challenges. But fear not, for you are well-prepared to take on whatever you may encounter.

And whether you ultimately write your story on the page, as today’s Commencement speaker has done so eloquently, know that through your actions and accomplishments, the choices you make and the lives you choose to lead, you will all write your stories on the world.

You are all capable of truly great things, and I look forward to hearing about them in the years to come.

Before we hand out diplomas, I’d like to encourage you to consider participating in a new tradition suggested by 55,000 Degrees, Louisville’s education movement: Pass the Cap. Pass the Cap is calling on college graduates to pass their graduation caps on to someone they believe can also earn a college degree.

One of the leaders of this effort is Madeline Abramson, who earned her bachelor’s degree from Bellarmine in December more than two decades after first attending college. She was inspired by her son, Sidney Abramson, who is receiving his own bachelor’s degree in communication today. Madeline is here today along with her husband, Lt. Gov. Jerry Abramson, a former executive in residence at Bellarmine. Congratulations to you, Abramson family, and thank you for your continued leadership by example.

Passing the cap may seem like a small thing. But sometimes, a simple word of encouragement can alter someone else’s life. And that brings me back to Thomas Merton, who had this to say about our connectedness:

“The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.”

No matter where your individual paths take you, Class of 2014, you will always be part of one another and part of Bellarmine University. We will always love you and we will always welcome you back to this place.

Congratulations! Godspeed as you begin the next chapter of your lives.

Now, on to your diplomas!