

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

OWU PRESIDENT ROCK JONES COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

Sunday, May 11, 2014

2014 COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

**Rock Jones, President of Ohio Wesleyan University
Sunday, May 11, 2014**

Chairman Long, Provost Stinemetz, Mr. Ollendorff, members of the Ohio Wesleyan faculty and staff, families and friends of our graduates, and most importantly members of the Ohio Wesleyan Class of 2014, welcome to the glorious occasion of this Commencement.

Graduates, this is your day.

We gather in a setting where you last assembled in August of 2010 as students about to begin the journey of college. Four years later, surrounded by these historic buildings dating from the century before last, and shaded by a canopy of trees that have graced this campus from its founding, you join tens of thousands of individuals who proudly bear the marks of alumni of Ohio Wesleyan University.

As has been the case for more than 170 years here at OWU, you have benefitted from rigorous classroom instruction, significant interaction with the master teachers and world class scholars seated behind me, and a host of learning experiences beyond the classroom.

The graduates who preceded you have made enormous contributions to the larger society through lives of extraordinary accomplishment and through day-to-day decisions to do the right thing. Now, you take your place among them.

But today, you leave Ohio Wesleyan to enter a world quite different from the world that awaited our past graduates. You will live in a global society and work in a global economy. Your generation will be challenged to face complex global problems and to seek lasting solutions that require the engagement of multiple disciplines of knowledge and a variety of ways of understanding. You will experience exponential growth in knowledge over the course of your lives, and you will be shaped by technologies not yet imagined.

With your Ohio Wesleyan education, you are more than ready.

Here at Ohio Wesleyan you honed the capacity for critical and analytical thinking. You developed the ability to understand complexity and nuance. You mastered the skill of persuasive writing and compelling speech. You cultivated an empathetic understanding of those whose cultures and life experiences are different from your own. You learned to work in teams of diverse people and emerge as leaders. You developed a commitment to public service and engaged citizenship. And you built a foundation of ethical values that will provide ballast and a moral compass throughout your life.

You are prepared for moral leadership in a global society.

My Ohio Wesleyan colleagues and I thank you for the enormous impact you made on this campus. Collectively, you leave a legacy that will impact the experiences of students who follow you in the years to come. You helped Ohio Wesleyan refine and enhance its commitment to an education that connects theory to practice in a global context.

Your class is the first to benefit fully from the OWU Connection. More of you studied and traveled abroad than any class in OWU history. Ninety-five of you spent a semester enrolled away from campus, and 164 of you participated in a travel learning course. Your travels took you to dozens of countries, including Madagascar, Micronesia, Ecuador, and Cuba, to name just a few. Seventy-eight of you received Theory-to-Practice grants, and 40 of you participated in one or more mission trips.

Most of you engaged in volunteer service. You launched the HaitiOWU initiative. You were instrumental in the development of the Healthy Bishop Initiative.

You won accolades for success in athletic competition, including a national championship in men's soccer. You staged the world premiere of a play written by one of your professors. You were singing a mass in a monastery in Italy when a new pope was elected. You conducted significant research and presented that research at important meetings of disciplinary societies.

You found your home in a diverse community and found particular benefit in knowing well your fellow students whose life experiences and personal stories are quite different from your own.

You embraced course connections that allowed you to explore with faculty from across the disciplines such important global issues as how the production and consumption of food shape our bodies, our cultures, and our environment; the relationship of crime, responsibility, and punishment; the interaction of poverty, equity, and social justice; and the protection and distribution of clean water. Through the Sagan National Colloquium, you explored such diverse topics as the continent of Africa and the impact of climate change. These, of course, are the challenges your generation inherits, and you are ready to confront them.

With your experience here at OWU, you will pursue lasting solutions that enhance the quality of human life, strengthen the structures of human societies, and preserve the rich beauty and bountiful resources of our planet.

Here at Ohio Wesleyan, you experienced and helped create in new ways the power of life shared together in human community. You shared times of great joy, and you embraced one another in times of deep pain and tragic loss.

Today we recall your classmate, Jakob Van Der Wellen, whose life ended all too soon but whose impact will live with you forever. We remember gathering to celebrate Jake's life, as we recall the numerous other times and places where we gathered over the past four years, sometimes in large numbers, and sometimes in the intimacy of a small group, to reflect on things that matter a great deal, or just to share the serendipitous pleasure of time together. You became part of a community that will accompany you for the rest of your lives; you developed friendships that will nourish you for a lifetime.

The diploma you receive today notes that you will live the rest of your life with all of the benefits of a liberal education. There are very few things that give one a stronger advantage for professional accomplishment and personal fulfillment than the education you have received.

Of equal importance, this education places upon your shoulders a mantle of responsibility. Today, I challenge you to accept this responsibility and to commit yourself anew to making a difference in the world.

Take the challenge to address climate change and preserve our planet; work to achieve lasting peace that ends war and violence; seek a just world where no one is hungry; cultivate a civil society in which differences are embraced; engage in the polity in ways that promote shared responsibility rather than division and antagonism.

Let your passion for a more just and caring society become the driving force of your life work. Be true to yourself and to the education you have received. You are ready, and I know you will make the world a better place.

Congratulations on this special day!