



Welcoming Remarks of President and Vice-Chancellor William Lahey for the Celebrations for the Classes of 2020 held on Friday May 6, 2022, at the University of King's College

Madame Chancellor, colleagues, family and friends, and most importantly, members of the Class of 2020.

Wow. The Class of 2020 is in the house! Even more amazingly, the sun is shining warmly on May 6 in Halifax!

Welcome back! Welcome home, both to those of you with us here at the Cohn and to all of you joining us on livestream. We see you too. We feel your presence. We are celebrating with you and your family and friends as well.

Let's start with something that is long overdue—a round of applause for the members of the Class of 2020—those watching from afar, please join in.

Graduates, time to return the favour. Let's hear the biggest noise you can make with applause for your families and friends and for all the faculty members and staff whose dedication to you made your King's and Dalhousie education possible and wonderful.

Hello Class of 2020. Before I say anything (more), I want to pause, just to drink in this sight—you—your friends and families, present, with us, at King's, and here to celebrate you ... We have been anticipating this moment for a very long time ... and the promise of today and your return has sustained us.

Over the past two years, much that we took for granted about our world has been suspended or utterly changed. There has probably been too much talk about resiliency; people are tired of being exhorted to be resilient. But you have been resilient: and you have persevered and you have overcome.

We have been called upon to put our abiding faith in love, hopefulness, friendship and kindness into practice under extraordinary conditions, especially for the most vulnerable to the pandemic and for those whose everyday vulnerability was accentuated by the pandemic and our response to it. And like students, recent graduates and young people everywhere, the weight of our response to the pandemic has fallen heavily on you.

With the Class of 2021, you are unique in the two-hundred-and thirty-three-year history of the University of King's College. You are also our heroes.

In the early days of the pandemic, the chorus of a favourite Bruce Springsteen song, Into the Fire, was much on my mind as I thought of you and our faculty and staff and all the people of King's. Paraphrased for this moment, it would go like this:

Your strength gave me strength

Your faith gave me faith

Your hope gave me hope

Your love gave me love

Until 2020, Encaenia happened in each of the two-hundred-and-thirty-one previous years of our long history.

It happened in every year of the First World War, the two years of the global flu pandemic that followed, and, in 1920, just months after the great fire that destroyed our Windsor campus.

There was also an Encaenia in each year of the Second World War, when the college buildings were being used to train naval officers.

The sacrifice of Encaenia in 2020 and 2021 was heartbreaking for all of us.

But you are graduates, just the same. Graduates who, with the Class of 2021, will always stand apart.

You completed courses and earned your degree in previously unfathomed conditions. You graduated into a world of intense economic and political uncertainty, lockdowns, social strife, rising costs, housing shortages and, for the last 60 days, the horrors of the war in Ukraine.

I have no doubt that through it all, you have found ways to live by the precepts of communal life and learning of your matriculation oath. You put love of learning and of others into action against, and in spite of, the pandemic.

We celebrated and honoured your accomplishments from different places but together in spirit, with online graduation.

Always with the promise that we would come together offline to say hello on the other side and to say goodbye properly.

I doubt any of us thought it would be two years later during another phase of a still-continuing pandemic.

Your lives have carried on. Your college carried on. But we know looking forward that carrying on as before is no longer good enough.

Together, we must be the change at King's and in the world we said was urgently needed in the wake of each of the events of the last two years that confronted us with the systemic injustices of the world.

Today's celebration is a perfect metaphor for our situation. In all the ways it is like the Encaenia that might have been, it vividly demonstrates our love for the traditions of King's and our gratitude for all that King's has done to make us into the human beings and the community we are—and aspire to be.

But in all the ways today is unlike Encaenia, it equally shows our resiliency, adaptability, and our willingness to preserve cherished traditions while we change King's to do our part for reconciliation, equity, diversity, inclusiveness, accessibility, and wellness and safety, including for Mother Earth.

This is what you called for and worked towards as students and as alumni over the past two years.

It is what your generation is calling for from all the institutions of our society, your university included.

Your hopefulness for the better future we can and must create is inspiring.

In the fullness of time, this will be the true and better measure of your unique place in the history of King's.

King's is changing precisely to make what you know is already great about King's available to those for whom it has been beyond reach and for those who have felt unwelcomed here. It is also changing to be enriched by those who will decide that a changing King's is for them.

To make these words into reality, all of us have to be as determined as you have been.

I am honoured—and need I say, wildly happy—to see you here today. Your return brings joy and new life to the college, just as your arrival did on a Move-in-Day or first day of classes that may seem long ago.

You have stuck with us, and with each other, demonstrating the universal value and indomitable strength of the essence of King's and the goodness we stand for. You have made history. You have made us proud beyond measure.

You are the new generation of alumni from whom King's will seek continued guidance as we work to repair our past and chart our future. Through your light, King's will be reflected, and made into our even better self. I, for one, will be looking for your guidance and praying, as I did in the early days of the pandemic, this time in Bruce's own words:

May your strength give us strength

May your faith give us faith

May your hope give us hope

May your love give us love

Let's enjoy this day.
