



Alumni Day 2024

Remarks by President William Lahey

Welcome everyone and good morning! I am thrilled to welcome you back to King's for Alumni Day 2024!

I hope you will today feel all the warmth and happiness that a visit home can bring. Because you *are* home. As I told the Class of 2024 just one week ago at Encaenia, King's will always be home.

A highlight of this past year has been the many opportunities I have had to spend time with alumni in the Lodge and on the road, from Moncton to Vancouver and Boston to Bermuda, with visits to Toronto and Ottawa along the way. In these post-pandemic times, I look forward to more visiting with alumni. I hope you will join me as the opportunities present themselves.

Meanwhile, Kathryn and I look forward to hosting a tea and sherry reception in the Lodge this afternoon, in honour of all of you here celebrating milestone anniversaries. You are all welcome. In our time, we have had receptions for tea drinkers and receptions for sherry drinkers but never a reception for tea and sherry drinkers. We assume they will get along but who knows what might happen with such radical experimentation! It might be worth coming just to see the mayhem unfold!

There are a few people in the room who I'd like to particularly acknowledge, beginning with Alumni Association President Steph McGrath—thank you Steph for all the fantastic work you're doing to keep the oldest alumni association in Canada going strong.

Last Friday, I had the honour of representing King's at the Dalhousie gathering at which the chair of our Board of Governors, Doug Ruck, was honoured with a Dalhousie Aurum Award. This is given to Dalhousie alumni who are "community-minded innovators and visionaries ... making a difference around the world." I can't think of a better description of Doug. Doug, with your vision, leadership, expertise and integrity, you have made an enormous difference in every dimension of your diverse career, always focused on inclusion for all. King's and Dalhousie are very lucky that we get to share you!

I also want to take a moment to highlight two King's legends who are today on the eve of their retirement. From their different corners of the Quad, Tom Curran and Neil Hooper have each embodied the core ethos of our university – total dedication to nurturing the learning and potential of each and every student. Although they have had very different job descriptions, they have both played the role of being part of the heart and soul of what we do and who we are. They will both remain very active at King's – we will see Tom in action this morning presiding as no one else could over the awarding of the Order of the Ancient Commoner – but still, their respective retirements are milestones in our history. It serves to alert the rest of us to how much we have to do to live up to their legacies. Please, a round of applause for Tom and Neil!

At this year's Encaenia, I asked the class of 2024, many of whom started their degrees in pandemic lock down, to embrace the love that was all around them and to know that it would go with them and stay with them for all of their days. I encouraged them to always remember they were worthy of the love they had found and given at King's.

I also thanked them for being an example of hopefulness for us all. I encouraged them to hold on to their hope and to think of hopefulness as a way to make the world a better place, including in how it lets us see the possibilities that both optimism and pessimism can overlook. I asked them to consider the ways in which hopefulness, like love, is not weak and wishy washy but tough and courageous. It gives us the strength and fortitude to push on in the face of hopelessness and to get back up when we are knocked down.

These are challenging and discouraging times for all of us but perhaps particularly for graduates heading out into the world. It is so important that they know that they are loved: this is why it is so important we now have more supports on campus for all students and dedicated supports on campus for Indigenous students, Black students and students from other underrepresented communities, students living with disabilities, trans and Queer students and for everyone's sexual health and safety.

It is also crucial our graduates know that the hopefulness that inspired them through their degrees can help them to make their unique contribution to the world.

And finally, I think it is so important for them to know they will always be surrounded by abiding love and hope in the King's community, now as alumni. It is the same love and hope, together with memories, that brings all of you back to the Quad today.

The will to make things better is a fundamentally loving and hopeful approach to the world. Education —the tie that binds us—is a profound demonstration of both love and hope. And so, I believe, King's is a place of love and hope. I see them both in every direction when I look around me, including in what may seem like prosaic areas such as program and curricular development.

For example, one year ago, we expanded our writing and publishing programs by welcoming the first cohort of our new Master of Fine Arts in Fiction program. As the writing & publishing world evolves, and in response to the huge success of the MFA in Creative Nonfiction, we recognized the need to give more writers from all walks of life and at different points in their career the opportunity to be part of a truly supportive, loving and hopeful community of writers that is the hallmark of the King's approach to graduate education in creative writing.

In undergraduate journalism, we introduced a new required course, called Indigenous Peoples and Media. This course was inspired by one of the Calls to Action from the National Truth & Reconciliation Commission, with the goal of ensuring that all King's journalism grads are entering the field with, quote, “a deeper understanding of Indigenous perspectives, Canadian history, key issues in reporting and the impacts of colonialism.” This course is also a major step forward in our ongoing work to be treaty people under the Treaties of Peace of Friendship. And what else is peace and friendship but love and hopefulness made into action?

A third example is the growth and development of our experiential learning programming for liberal arts students, in which we are becoming a leader. Our progress includes Books by Heart, in which students, faculty and alumni are working together to understand how nurturing book culture on hospital cardiac wards can improve patient healing and well-being. What could be more loving and hopeful than that?

Now, the province is funding us to develop a microcredentials program that will help liberal arts graduates from King's and other universities find careers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. If you grew up on a farm in the woods like I did, or if you have spent as much time as I have in thinking about how forestry and ecosystems can be mutually supportive, you would surely see that this project is also about love and hopefulness, including for our rural communities and ways of life.

As one final example of the many more I could give, we had the absolute privilege in February of hosting the classics scholar Dr. Emily Wilson for the 10th Alex Fountain Memorial Lecture. Dr. Wilson has become something of a "rock star" in classics for her fresh approach to translating Homer, using contemporary language to bring the reader closer to an understanding of how those in ancient Greece might have understood Homer's poetry. Can you imagine anything more quintessentially King's than more than 100 King's students lined up in and outside Alumni Hall, through the door and into the Willwerth Garden on a cold night, all waiting to get their copies of the *Odyssey* or of the *Iliad* signed by a beautifully tattooed Classics scholar who was here to give a lecture on translation! It was a

truly beautiful sight to behold, and the appreciation was clearly mutual. Following the lecture, which was packed, Emily wrote to us saying,

“It was an extraordinary experience to speak to this very special community—and to see so many copies of *The Odyssey* with Post-it notes on almost every page! It filled me with hope about the present and future of humanities education.”

Like I said, King’s is a place of love and hope.

And today it is also a place of celebration, and always, one of community. King’s alumni are fundamental to the strength and vibrancy of our beautiful and enduring little college. I want to thank each of you for joining us for this wonderful Alumni Day celebration and for all you do to enrich our King’s community and all of the communities to which you give your love and hopefulness!