

REMARKS TO THE GRADUATES: President Hannigan

Good morning, Class of 2024!

Today marks the 151st Commencement of Ursinus College, a college justifiably proud of its history, traditions, and commitment to serving the common good.

Just four years ago, you graduated high school online. The college welcomed this exuberant—and less we forget—*masked* class to Ursinus a few months later. You lived in family units, learned from your rooms, missed your fall season, and performed for each other outside on the lawn. It was not the college experience you dreamt of; I am sure! When you started, you surely had to wonder if this day would ever come.

Well, Class of 2024, let's hear it! Your moment has arrived!

As we gather here today to honor these graduating Ursinus students, we recognize the commitment and love their families—born and chosen—bring to this day. Class of 2024, please stand, turn towards your parents, friends, and family, and thank them with a rousing round of applause.

And...before you take your seats, let's give a proper Ursinus shout-out to the faculty and staff who guided and supported you on your journey.

Graduates, please be seated.

I also want to welcome and congratulate our honorands, Reverend Doctor Lorina Marshall-Blake, and Mr. Will Abele. Each is a magnificent example of what we value here at Ursinus College: a commitment to excellence, moral leadership, and good deeds.

One of the privileges of being President and having a captive audience is sharing some parting thoughts with you all. Today, I am offering a leadership challenge to our graduating seniors.

In your time here, you've learned the value of asking tough questions and the importance of not accepting easy answers. You've learned that genuine dialogue isn't about agreeing but understanding and respecting differing viewpoints. This is more than academic; it's a profound moral commitment to engage with the world honestly and courageously.

As you leave here today, your focus will shift from a setting intentionally created to give you the space to grow as an individual to your life after Ursinus—a life led by a profound and genuine commitment to the common good.

For me, among all the other leadership skills you've learned and made your own here at Ursinus, there are two critical components: a sense of humility and a sense of humor.

An Ursinus leader embraces the complexity of the world with passion and resolve. An Ursinus leader's actions are guided by curiosity and empathy. Ursinus leaders check their ego at the door—you know it is not the volume of your voice but the power of your ideas that matter. You understand that no ideas are too small. You know precisely what my dad meant when he said [leagfaidh tua bheag crann mór] “lag-fee-ah too-ah be-yo-gh crah-nn moo-er”. No? It's an Irish expression about felling a big tree with a small axe, you know anything is possible inspirational stuff... sounds more inspirational in Irish I guess.

Today, I remind you that, to lead, you must listen. Remember, real change comes from understanding the nuances and the gray areas. And to understand, you must listen. A leader fights the allure of simple narratives and instead engages deeply with our world's messy, complicated truths.

In a little over an hour from now, you will be alumni of Ursinus College. You will join one of the most loyal and enthusiastic alumni communities I've encountered, the envy of any college or university! Among these fellow alumni, you will find old friends and new ones. You will

discover mentors and come to know leaders across all walks of life. Take advantage of these relationships and stay connected and devoted to each other and your college.

And now let's return to where we began, back when everyone told you these next four years will be the best of your life. I know these were four fantastic years for nearly all of you. But you will only reach the full promise of a Ursinus education if you leave here and continue to learn, listen, and lead. These were the best four years of your life because they prepared you to live and lead with purpose and grace.

Congratulations, Class of 2024!