

Sydney Campus Graduation 2021
Farewell Address
June 9 2021: 1:00 PM Ceremony
2020 graduates from the Schools of Law, Medicine, and Nursing

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To begin, I would first like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, university staff, fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen.

Recently, I returned home from work and switched on the TV. An episode of the "West Wing" was playing. The storyline centred on the friendship of the White House staff and at the end of the episode the White House Chief of Staff told this anecdote to his deputy:

"A guy's is walking down a street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep, he can't get out.

A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up, "Hey Dr, can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on.

Then a priest comes along, and the guy shouts up "Father, I'm down in this hole, can you help me out?" The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on.

Then our guy, sees a friend walk by. "Hey Joe, it's me, can you help me out?" And the friend jumps in the hole. Our guy says, "What are you doing? Now we're both down here." The friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out."

How many of us in this room have been down that hole and relied on a friend to help us out?

During my 5 years of study at Notre Dame, I gained not just a degree in Arts and Law, but developed friendships that I know not only helped me to get through my studies, but enabled me to mature and develop, so that I could be that friend who leant a helping hand to others.

My cohort was made up of students, some like me who came straight from high school, whilst others came after completing other degrees and yet others were mature age students, with life experience. We all had a common goal, to complete our degree and use what we had learned to change the world.

But getting an education was just one part of our degree. Forming relationships and friendships was another key integral part. Our lecturers supported and furnished us with the skills to set us on the path to graduate, but it was the friends we made, from whom we drew inspiration, courage and laughter to help push us towards reaching that final goal. The late night phone or video calls, the countless hours in the library, studying together and motivating each other. Early wake up reminder calls, to ensure deadlines and exams were not missed or alerting each other to job opportunities in our chosen field. We worked together; helping each other to achieve our dream to graduate and to establish careers and in doing so friendships were formed.

The support and encouragement of the Law School faculty and students was in play from day one. Indeed in the first weeks of class, I met my best friend, Esther. I was from Camperdown. Esther was from Campbelltown.

Filled with naive enthusiasm, Esther and I decided to enter our first law competition, First Year, Semester One. The competition was available to the entire law school. Encouraged by our lecturers, older and fellow students, we reached the Grand Final. We didn't win that competition, but throughout our university life, Esther and I continued to work and study together, we pushed each other to be the very best that we could be and we surrounded ourselves with a group of friends who shared our vision and our values. We entered more competitions, always together, most we won, others we lost, although those are still on appeal. We joined the Notre Dame Student Law Society and from there took on positions at the Australian Law Students Association. Through our friendship these two girls from Camperdown and Campbelltown obtained the opportunity to travel and compete under the Notre Dame banner in competitions in both Australia and on the international stage. Indeed, before Esther and I had completed our studies, through Notre Dame, we had made friends with other students from Universities across Australia, the UK, Europe, Asia, the Americas and Canada. And yes there were times when Esther and I were scared and frightened and we fell down that hole, but Esther always got me out, ably supported by our friends and the staff at Notre Dame.

And Esther, I like to think there were times, I jumped down that hole with you too.

My school friends are envious of my Notre Dame friendships. Not all of them have had the same experience that I have had at University. Many did not make friends at all and did not have the opportunities to travel or become part of international mootings or debating teams, their time at University was a lonely experience.

The University of Notre Dame offers students a unique experience.

The smaller campus and the way in which students learn and interact allows for a more collegial atmosphere. As a law student, the classroom atmosphere provided students with a more engaging experience with lecturers and other students. It also allowed for the free flow of ideas and discussions. Moreover, the compulsory LOGOS study, combining philosophy, ethics and theology, brings together students from all campuses to learn and study important lessons, which contribute to not only study but also our role in the world.

You see where I am going here ... if I am down that hole ... well I want one of my Notre Dame friends down there with me, to help me get out.

Completing my degrees in 2019, I was looking forward to commencing work and beginning the next chapter in my life. Along with my friends, I had ordered my cap and gown, when the Covid-19 Pandemic hit and our graduation was cancelled. As the pandemic changed our world, my Notre Dame friendships became even more cherished. Whilst we could not see each other for some time, we remained in touch, even having a mock graduation over Zoom, with a book as a makeshift cap and a glass of champagne in hand.

This was a unique event, but as the graduating class of Notre Dame 2020 knows when that hole appears, we will be there to help each other out, whether that is by using our intellectual skills or maybe through our collective friendships. We know that it doesn't matter what the world throws at us, whether it be good or bad, easy or hard, we will be there for each other, because the education we have been given has taught us first and foremost the value of friendship and learning.

Notre Dame is a private Catholic University. We draw inspiration from the teachings of the Catholic faith and from Jesus Christ. Because the anecdote of the hole is really analogous to Christ's love for us: "No one has greater love than this, but to lay down one's life for one's friends".

My fellow graduates of the class of 2020, I thank you for your friendship and support, congratulate you on your achievements and wish you well in your future endeavours. Remember at some time or another in life we're all going to fall down that hole, but if Notre Dame has taught us anything there are plenty of friends here to help you get back out.