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Associate Professor Randy J. Kozel, Diploma Ceremony Address

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ADDRESS TO THE CLASS OF 2014
Randy J. Kozel, Notre Dame Law School

Thank you so much for this tremendous honor. I can't tell you how much it means to me, and what a privilege it's been to get to know you, the Class of 2014.

For me, being here feels like coming full circle. Back in August of 2011, when I met many of you in our Contracts class, your first day of studying the subject was my first day of teaching the subject—or, for that matter, of teaching any subject. And I'd be willing to bet that I was one of the most nervous people in the building that day. But, together, we all found a way to make it through. Now here we are three years later, and I'm deeply honored to have the opportunity to talk with you one more time before you walk across the stage.

I'd like to begin by saying a word of congratulations to the parents, families, and friends of our graduating students. My own daughter, Kate Marie, is 4 years old, and I've brought her to the law school for countless visits. In part, this is because she thinks Notre Dame Law students are some of the most fascinating people on the planet. But it's also a very deliberate choice that my wife and I have made. Abi and I love the fact that our daughter has the opportunity to be around students who are so impressive in so many ways. When she visits the school, Kate Marie sees students who are intelligent, dedicated, and enthusiastic, as well as kind, gracious, and generous. As a parent, I can't imagine a better group of role models for my daughter to follow. And as a fellow member of the Notre Dame community, I'll do my best to live up to the high standards of performance and character that have been set by the Class of 2014.

It's customary in these settings to attempt a few words of wisdom about life after graduation. To be honest, I'm not sure I have any advice to offer that you haven't heard before. So instead of

trying to tell you something you don't know, I thought I might take this opportunity to underscore a couple of things that you do know.

Today is, in many respects, a day of change. Throughout the country, graduating classes are being told that they're entering a changing world, one in which predictions are extremely difficult and adaptation is crucial. And that's good advice, especially for young lawyers. The legal profession is changing, and we need to be ready to change with it.

But I want to remind you that even in an uncertain and changing world, there are some things that are permanent, timeless, and rock-solid. These certainties are what anchor us when we feel like we're being tossed around. There are things that we *just know*, and they're as true today as they will be in ten years, twenty years, or fifty years. The trick is making sure we pay attention to them along the way.

You know, as you look around at those who have gathered here to support you, that your relationships with family and friends are valuable beyond description. No matter what path your life takes, you'll never regret the time you spent calling your mom and dad to say hello, or reaching out to friends who were dealing with grief, or reading books to your kids. That's one of life's absolute certainties. We lawyers are a risk-averse bunch, but this one is risk-free: If we devote ourselves to the people we love, all the hours we spend with them are guaranteed to pay off, even if we don't always recognize it at the time.

You know that the practice of law can be an amazing way to earn your livelihood while contributing to the greater good. I found my years in legal practice to be interesting, rewarding, and a lot of fun, and I'm excited for the opportunities that all of you will have in the years ahead. Of course, practicing law also brings its share of challenges. Not every task is glamorous, and the

demands on your time can be substantial. There's no avoiding those realities. But what you can do is try to surround yourself with people who respect you and your abilities, and, above all, people you can learn from. And you can draw boundaries to make sure that, even as you're working hard, you'll always have time for the things that are important to you. These steps can mean the difference between a job that feels onerous and dispiriting, and one that feels engaging and invigorating. It's much, much easier to work those late nights and weekends when you're being treated with dignity and respect. The right people and the right culture can make even the most demanding job a pleasure to do.

None of this is easy. But it can definitely be done. In my career I've had the opportunity to work for lawyers whose scope of responsibilities seemed to be endless, and whose schedules were as grueling as anything I could imagine. Yet even while being at the top of their field, those lawyers managed to stay connected with family and friends, to give back to their communities in numerous ways, and to conduct themselves with absolute graciousness and integrity. From what I've learned about you during your years at Notre Dame—about your intellect, your energy, and your character—I'm fully confident of your ability to follow that lead.

You know that there's a difference between a job and a calling. This world has a place for you, a calling where you can use your talents in a way that brings not just job satisfaction, but a feeling of genuine, honest-to-goodness *peace* that comes with finding the right fit. It may be prosecuting criminals, defending the accused, litigating commercial cases for a private corporation or law firm, working for a nonprofit agency, or starting a solo practice. And you might be called to do different things at different times over the course of your career; indeed, I suspect that will be true for many of you, and maybe all of you. But at any given moment, your calling is out there, waiting for you to find it.

Some of you already have a good idea of what you're called to do next, of the path that you want to follow. For others, it will take a few years before you hear your call. Don't let that worry you. Lots of lawyers—and I include myself among them—didn't have a clear sense of calling by the time they graduated. And many more would eventually come to realize that they were being pulled toward something—a job opportunity, a community, a social cause—that they never expected.

Even if you haven't yet found your calling, it's never too early to start listening, because finding a way to pursue what you are called to do will make all of the work and all of the sacrifice worthwhile. That's another one of those rock-solid truths.

It was a focus on calling that brought me here to Notre Dame. Four years ago, I was working in a job that I really liked, for a boss who I greatly admired. But I couldn't shake the feeling that God had a different plan for me. And I felt that calling in a special way when I came to visit the Notre Dame campus. So after a lot of talking and a lot of praying, Abi and I decided to pack up the family and start a new chapter here in Indiana. We realized, in the end, that when you hear your call, you'll never go wrong by following it.

I can't predict your paths in the law any more than I could've predicted my own, but what I can tell you is that sooner or later, you're going to hear a call, and it's a defining moment.

You know that your many gifts and talents are meant for something bigger. As I reflect on this wonderful occasion, I'm struck again by the brightness of God's light, just as I was when I visited Notre Dame for the first time. That light shines on all of us. It also gives us a model to follow.

Our era, like every era, is one of frenetic movement, constant change, and abiding complexity. But whatever else comes our way, we can know for certain that our role is to share the light inside each of us with our friends, families, communities, and profession.

And ultimately, that's the reason why I'm able to view this as a day of joy and celebration despite my sadness about not seeing you at the law school next fall. Remember, the first day of school for the Class of 2014 was my first day of school, too, so I'm not exaggerating when I say I literally can't imagine this place without you. Your dedication has enriched this school. Your enthusiasm has energized it. Your kindness has shaped its tone and culture.

But the legal profession needs lawyers like you. And our communities need leaders like you. The light you shine is too bright to keep in one place. It has to be shared.

There's one more certainty, one that goes to the heart of why we've gathered here. As of today, you know that whatever else your life may bring, you are graduates of Notre Dame Law School. You've earned a degree in one of the most challenging and honorable disciplines from one of the country's preeminent schools. During your years at Notre Dame, you've become experts in questioning, doubting, and arguing about everything. That's a useful and valuable skill. But it doesn't change the fact that some things are just plain true. And your achievement in earning this degree is one of them.

Congratulations, Class of 2014. You are called to do great things, and we are all honored and blessed to be able to witness them.