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Professor Bruce Huber, Diploma Ceremony Address

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Let me begin by adding my wholehearted congratulations to the Notre Dame Law School Class of 2017, and to the parents and friends and significant others who have supported you. Whether you were top of your class, middle of your class, never went to class—whatever the case may be, this is an impressive achievement. It's an achievement I'd like to commemorate by sharing with you my newly-completed defense of the common law Rule Against Perpetuities ...

Class of 2017: our wish for you as you venture out from Notre Dame is simply that you flourish, that you thrive. The concept of human flourishing has been kicked around quite a bit lately, in various circles; frankly it's become a bit of a buzzword. Here at Notre Dame, we can politely smile at this newfound interest from the vantage point of a faith tradition that has been exploring human flourishing, human purpose, human well-being, for millennia. One of the most important things we get from our faith is an understanding of what it means to be human—what human life is like, what human life is about. And in the Christian tradition, at least, one enduring conclusion is that at the heart of human flourishing is something like self-emptying or self-sacrifice or service of others.

This is a somewhat paradoxical and difficult thing to accept: that in giving, we gain; that in emptying ourselves for others, we are ourselves made more complete. I don't need to tell you that this view of human flourishing is distinctly at odds with much of the wisdom of the day; it's at odds with our own intuitions, our own gut sense of what it means to thrive. If you're like me, you may tend to think of thriving as something to be attained, something just out there in front of you, something you'll finally experience when you graduate or make partner or get married or have a house or a real income.

All of these things certainly tap into our deepest longings as humans, but the better view—the view that best makes sense of the entirety of human experience—is that to flourish is to serve and to sacrifice. Now, fortunately for you, you are entering a service profession. It is an elite profession, to be sure, but the practice of law is a *service*. In this respect you stand alongside some of the most important service providers in our society: you stand alongside housecleaners and landscapers, auto mechanics, social workers, doctors and nurses and home health workers. You, like them, will be providing a direct service to human beings. I say this not to belittle your chosen career but rather to dignify it. For, again, there is nothing more dignifying than to serve another human being. In so doing, you dignify yourself and the other, and you put yourself on the path of flourishing.

Most obviously, you will be serving your clients. The fact that you will generally do this in exchange for money does not render your service any less important, any less valuable, any less dignified or dignifying. The problems that your clients will bring to you will be real and often excruciatingly difficult. In the main, these clients will be glad to pay you for your

competent assistance, just as you and I and everyone here, when we are in difficulty, when we are in need of some service, are grateful to learn that someone can help. We are often relieved to be able to pay people of integrity and skill for competent, honest service. All too often we do not have access to such people. Just this week, I have been lied to by an air conditioner serviceman, stood up by the chimney repair guy (came on Monday; said he'd be back tomorrow; haven't seen him since), "handled" by a suspiciously aggressive service manager at the Toyota dealer, and left high and dry by the person who usually cuts my hair! (That last one is my wife, so my options for redress are more limited.) I hope that you will make it your goal—sounds trite, I know—make it your goal to serve your clients and to do your job to the very best of your ability. Serving others need not and will not always look heroic. Our ordinary work in ordinary moments makes the world go round. Simply getting up in the morning and doing your bit as best you can is the beginning and the basis of civilization and human welfare and social well-being. So serve your clients with honesty, and with commitment, and with your best self.

Whom else will you serve? You will, I hope and expect, serve your family and your community. These go hand in hand. Families are the backbone of community. Neglecting your family is one of the fastest paths to misery of which I am aware. Most of you have not yet started your own families, but you can already practice the kind of service that family will require by attending to your closest relationships and zealously protecting and nurturing them when pressures arise, as they have and will. It is frighteningly easy to let even your most intimate relationships wither in the swelter and stress of work.

I have shared this vignette with some of you, but when I began law school, I was also beginning a long-distance relationship with a person that I cared about very much, a woman who is now my wife. One of my mentors in law, upon learning of this budding relationship, advised me to postpone it until after law school, and he said to me, very memorably, "you see Bruce, the law is a jealous mistress." I am happy to say that I did not heed his advice, and Sarah and I were married in the middle of my 2L year. I readily confess this was more out of passion than wisdom, but I now can say with greater confidence that the law can only be a mistress for one who is unfaithful. So be faithful; serve your family; honor your friendships. Nurture your ability to care for those closest to you. These relationships will bring you, and them, great joy and in serving them you and they will flourish.

As to serving your community beyond your family, this is what we typically think of when we think of people engaged in service and self-sacrifice: the people who do great pro bono work; who are involved with non-profits; who volunteer tirelessly in their neighborhoods, at schools, in prisons, at churches, among the homeless, and so forth. I have deliberately tried to frame a life of service as beginning with those commitments, to work and to

family, that are often not regarded as service. Yet they can and should be profoundly sacrificial, profoundly other-regarding. They are crucial because it is in those relationships, those parts of life nearest to us, where we learn the worth of others—where we learn to see others as more important than ourselves. With some discipline and some intentionality, we can see that everyone around us bears the image of God—everyone around us merits our service, our regard, our sacrifice. No matter their social standing; their level of education; their taste in tattoos; their politics. Even Michigan fans bear the image of God! (USC fans, no; they are agents of the devil.)

So YES, all those community service-y things that you once did so that could put them on your school applications and resumes? Do them now because they lead to human flourishing—for you and for others. Do them now because you have learned to see every human being as your equal. Do them now to guard yourself against the dehumanizing divisions that are so evident in our society today. Do them now because you now stand in a position of great power, even if it doesn't quite feel like it yet, and that power, and the prestige that comes with it, is a danger to your heart if you employ it primarily for selfish gain, but a balm for others and their troubles if you use it to serve.

Finally: I have not said anything about serving yourself. And yet I have—because I have said that in serving others, you yourself will thrive. And this is no accident; this is the way the world is designed. I do not believe for a second that the moral universe is a zero-sum place, that my gain can only come at another's expense. No, when you serve, you yourself benefit too, and that does not diminish your service in the slightest. This brings us back to where we began—our faith. For we are taught in Scripture that in loving our neighbor, we serve the very God who authored human life and who in Christ embodied its nature and revealed its essence. It is no exaggeration to say that in your acts of service, you join in the work of God, you participate in the project of creation and redemption. You thrive.

And so, Class of 2017, go forth; flourish; thrive; serve others. And that is all I have to say about the Rule Against Perpetuities. Congratulations again, and may God bless you all!