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## Professor Veronica Root Martinez, Diploma Ceremony Address

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## Well Done

Graduates, parents, family, friends, Dean Cole, and my distinguished faculty and staff colleagues. I am honored to be in your presence today as we celebrate the 2022 graduating class of Notre Dame Law School.

I've spent quite a bit of time thinking about what I most wanted to say to this class, and I eventually realized that the most important thing I could tell you on this day is—Well Done.

I focus on that phrase—well done because I believe it to be one of the highest compliments one can receive. When you've put in a huge amount of effort and time and tears and passion and perseverance, as you have in your three years at the Law School, it's important for that work to be acknowledged. And today, I want you to know, that we appreciate all that you've done for the Law School and our community during your time here. Today, on behalf of my colleagues and the Law School, I want you to know that you've more than earned the acknowledgement of Well Done.

When you arrived at the Law School in Fall 2019, you came with so much spirit and excitement. I vividly remember contracts students from that semester. You were smart. And insightful. And warm. And gracious. You engaged with the material at an extraordinarily high level. You forced me and my colleagues to do better. Well Done.

The reality is that the world was a completely different place when you decided to come to law school. Few of us truly understood what the words "global pandemic" meant. And we all had our worlds turned upside down during the spring of 2020. The law school experience you expected disappeared in the blink of an eye. Instead of being in the classroom with your friends and colleagues. Instead of coming for in-person office hours. Instead of having Bar Review and Barristers Ball. You had Zoom. And more Zoom. And Zoom again. But you didn't give up. You kept doing your reading. Coming to Zoom class. Fighting to learn your material under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. You pressed on in the quest to achieve the goals you had set out for yourself. Well Done.

And then, as if a pandemic wasn't enough, you then had to reckon with the death of George Floyd. As law students, you were forced to consider what the manner of his death said about justice and equality—ideals that prompted many of you to come to

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this Law School in the first place. But you didn't ignore these hard topics and truths. You engaged with them. You wrote letters. Hosted talks and symposia. Joined discussion groups. Had difficult conversations with friends and classmates. You took courses you wouldn't have otherwise taken. You thought deeply about how to make a difference. And you challenged the Law School to better live up to its own ideals surrounding racial justice. Well Done.

It is my sincere hope, that this, your last year at the Law School, approached something much closer to normalcy. I've seen your smiles in the hallways and Commons. I've seen your spirits lift after the anguish that the pandemic presented. And it may be this that I'm most proud of you for. Because the reality is that the law school experience you expected to have was taken from you. And when an experience is taken from you, as sometimes occurs in life, it's appropriate to grieve that loss. But it's also important to accept the realities of the situation in front of you, keep moving forward, and not allow the bad to prevent you from seeing the good in each and every situation. To not allow having experienced the depths of despair to prevent you from reaching the heights of joy. Your law school experience wasn't typical. But you surmounted each and every challenge that tried to obstruct your path. Well Done.

And perhaps what's most important is you did all of these things while remaining, at least from my perspective, focused on creating a community of kindness within and throughout the Law School. I personally have experienced that spirit from each of you during your time here. Whether it was walking down the sign-in sheet to me every day at the end of class. Or staying up late at night to help me with edits. Or buying gifts for my children. Praying for me when I was pregnant with my youngest. Repeatedly taking my classes and juicing my student evaluations stats. Or telling me how much it meant to you to have me as a professor--even if I then responded in a very socially awkward way. Your kindness is something I've felt every day during your time at this Law School. And your kindness gave me hope when I was in my own low place during the challenges of the past three years. My colleagues and I will always be grateful to you for all that you've done to ensure that the Law School remained true to itself, its mission, its culture, and its community despite the unprecedented challenges you have faced over the last three years. Well Done.

Of course, now it's time to venture out from the Law School. And while you will always have a home here, you are about to enter the legal profession and you will scatter across the nation and the world. As you do this, I hope you remember that we

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did not educate you to be just like all the other lawyers that you will meet as you embark on your legal career. We educated you to be a lawyer who focuses on how your life and your vocation can bring goodness to the world and your fellow person. And I challenge you, when faced with difficult decisions, to think about what response would garner a “Well Done” from your mom, your dad, your Abuelita, your God. Sometimes, the path towards a Well Done is quiet. It’s extending a hand and helping someone down from a precarious position. And sometimes that road is a very public one and requires turning over tables. Regardless of the situation, I urge you to remember that all that you’ve learned during your time here is worth very little if you do not frame that learning through the wisdom of the heart. If you can do that, I strongly believe, that you will use your intellect, your perseverance, your sense of justice, your joy, and your kindness to create a life for yourself that is worthy of the designation - Well Done.