

5-2007

Associate Professor Jennifer Mason McAward Commencement Address

Jennifer Mason McAward
Notre Dame Law School, mason.1@nd.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/commencement_programs



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McAward, Jennifer Mason, "Associate Professor Jennifer Mason McAward Commencement Address" (2007). *Commencement Programs*. Paper 16.

http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/commencement_programs/16

This Address is brought to you for free and open access by the Law School History at NDLScholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Commencement Programs by an authorized administrator of NDLScholarship. For more information, please contact lawdr@nd.edu.

Commencement

May 20, 2006 dawned gray and ominous in South Bend, and rain threatened all day long. Still, at 9:45 a.m., the class of 2007 strode from the north entrance of the Law School to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart for a hooding ceremony untouched by even a drop of rain. They gathered again, after the general commencement ceremony, for an outdoor diploma ceremony by the reflecting pool in front of the Hesburgh Library, again untouched by more than a few drops of rain. As the winds played havoc with their graduation robes and even shuffled the pages of the dean's final charge to the class, they listened intently to Prof. Mason's address to them, walked proudly across the stage to receive their diploma from the dean, then listened again as the dean shared with them her recollected thoughts on happiness in the lives of lawyers. For our graduates, for their families, and for the faculty who taught them, it was a day to remember.

— John H. Robinson



Notre Dame Law School Commencement Speech

JENNIFER M. MASON
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LAW

Thank you so much for this honor. I can't tell you how much it means to me to have this chance to celebrate with you today. Two short years ago, you had just finished your first year of law school. At that same moment, I was preparing to move to South Bend and try my hand at teaching. You were exhausted but very relieved. I was energized but very anxious. And so our paths converged at the beginning of your 2L year. You have welcomed me into this community. You have continually impressed me with your intelligence and insight. You have taught me numerous lessons in thoughtfulness, prayerfulness, and generosity. This is the most rewarding job I ever could have asked for, and I am deeply grateful to you for making it so.

Now, as those of you who have taken my classes know, I can be a stickler for obscure details. I dredge up the human stories behind many of the cases we read. I plumb the hidden meanings of random footnotes. Today, I hope you'll indulge me in one more detour into obscure facts—this time, etymology.

Everyone refers to today's events as "Commencement," a word that has its roots in the Latin term meaning "to begin." I suppose that's technically an accurate description, as today marks the beginning of your careers in the law.

But, with all due respect to the event planners, I think that the word "Commencement" is a wholly inadequate way to describe what this event is really about. Today is not just about new beginnings. Today is a much more profound celebration of where you've been and where you're going.

Therefore, if I had my way, we would call this event a "Commissioning," a word that also has its roots in Latin. But those roots are much more nuanced. In one sense, "To Commission" can mean "To Gather Together." "To Commission" can also mean "To Entrust." And, in a third sense, "To Commission" can mean "To Send."

To Gather Together. To Entrust. To Send. These three things, I believe, are really what today's commissioning ceremony is all about.

You gather together today as a community of scholars, who have spent the past three years in common pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and truth. You gather as a community of friends, who have spent



that time encouraging each other, praying together, serving together, and relaxing together. And today, you gather with your families, those people who have been your primary sources of love and support throughout your lives and your education.

By gathering together for today's celebration, you reflect the truth that human beings flourish in community. Not one of you has gotten to this day on your own, and not one of you can thrive alone in the days to come. It is only by being in community with others that you can fully engage your hearts, your minds, and your souls.

By gathering today, you also acknowledge the call of our chosen profession. As lawyers, you are called to be both community leaders and community servants. In a culture that often encourages greed and materialism, you must prize generosity and service, and dedicate your professional efforts to making your communities stronger, more vibrant, and more just.

So, you've gathered together as both a sign and symbol of the community you have been and will be. And in just a few minutes, you will be handed a diploma. In that one small gesture, in that one brief moment, you are being entrusted with great and profound power—the power to invoke and shape the law.

The law can be a tremendous force for good in this world. It can be used to promote human dignity and build up community. It can also be used to denigrate and divide. After today, the power of the law is in your hands, and we are entrusting it to you with the confidence that you will use it to serve the common good rather than selfish interest.

The common good requires that you promote and honor the dignity of every person with whom you come into contact. This is easy enough to do when you have a sympathetic client—and each of you should have sympathetic clients throughout your career. Whatever your chosen field in the law, I believe that each of you has a moral obligation to work pro bono on behalf of the poor and to speak on behalf of the voiceless. With great power comes great responsibility.

The common good also requires that you honor the dignity of those who are not your clients. Even unsympathetic opponents deserve justice and a measure of compassion. And because any particular case or deal can have ripple effects far beyond the parties, you must be conscious of the consequences of your decisions and actions. Let wisdom and the cause of justice be your guide.

So, we have gathered together to entrust you with great power. And at the end of today's Commissioning Ceremony, we will send you. Not in the sense of sending you away from here, for you will always have a place here, just as Notre Dame will always have a place in your hearts. Rather, we are sending you forward to bring Notre Dame and its spirit to other people and other places that are in desperate need of your energy, your wisdom, and your compassion.

We, the faculty, are sending you forward, having given you our best efforts to share our knowledge with you. We are sending you forward with our gratitude for the many gifts you have shared with us. And we are sending you forward with our prayers, our blessing, and our confidence that, commissioned here today, you will do great things in the days and years to come.

Congratulations, good luck, and may God bless you.





2007 Commencement Awards

ALI-ABA Scholarship and Leadership Award

Brian P. Morrissey, Jr.
Manhasset, New York

Edward F. Barrett Award, The Arthur A. May Award, Clinical Legal Education Association Outstanding Student Award

Toni Mardirossian
Germantown, Maryland

Edward F. Barrett Award

James Michael Paulino
Rochester, New York

Joseph Ciraolo Memorial Award, The A. Harold Weber Moot Court Award

Adèle Hutton Auxier
Fort Langley, British Columbia, Canada

The Farabaugh Prize

Brian Ernest Foster
Buchanan, Michigan

The Farabaugh Prize

Matthew Michael Killen
Maumee, Ohio

The Colonel William J. Hoynes Award

Tara Michele Stuckey
Waterville, Ohio

International Academy of Trial Lawyers Award, The A. Harold Weber Moot Court Award

Stephen Heuron Robinson
Stamford, Connecticut

International Academy of Trial Lawyers Award

Patrick Albert Salvi II
Lake Forest, Illinois

Jessup International Moot Court Award

Andrew Paul Moosmann
Washington, Missouri

Conrad Kellenberg Award

Stephen Michael Duvernay
Chico, California

William T. Kirby Award

Adam Keith Butman
Atlanta, Georgia

William T. Kirby Award

Craig Michael Perrotta
Miller Place, New York

Dean Konop Legal Aid Award

Jessica Lynn Hensley
Saint Charles, Illinois

The Jon E. Krupnick Award

Angelo Salvatore Gambino
Buffalo, New York

The Jon E. Krupnick Award

Kevin Frawley Moot
Park Ridge, Illinois

David T. Link Award

Kristine Schmidt
Northbrook, Illinois

The Judge Joseph E. Mahoney Award, The A. Harold Weber Moot Court Award

Heather Ann Cameron
Woodbridge, Virginia

Captain William O. McLean Law School Community Citizenship Award

Jon Douglas Schoenwetter
Waterloo, Wisconsin

National Association of Women Lawyers Award

Jeanine Marie Valles
San Dimas, California

Dean Joseph O'Meara Award

Glenn David Mathues
Aiken, South Carolina

The A. Harold Weber Moot Court Award

Charles Richard Hedman, II
Mishawaka, Indiana

The A. Harold Weber Moot Court Award

Katherine Davis Spitz
Sussex, Wisconsin

The A. Harold Weber Writing Award

Jennifer Lynne Morris