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May 13, 2023

Undergraduate Commencement Speech

President Kathleen A. Getz, Ph.D.

Good afternoon! And a warm welcome to Mercyhurst University Trustees, Administrators, Faculty and Staff, invited guests, families, friends, those joining us via livestream, and, most importantly, to the Mercyhurst University Class of 2023.

Your parents and families are no doubt remembering various special moments in your lives – you are and always will be their precious children. Yet, however nostalgic we are about the children you once were, we truly admire the adults you have become.

Graduates, you know better than anyone else that you did not reach this pinnacle on your own. Let's take a moment to recognize those who have stood by you throughout the years and who are with you today, in person or in spirit: your loving families, friends, professors, coaches, and advisers – let's give them all a hand.

Your class has shared some memorable Mercyhurst experiences in the past four years.

- You hosted a number of timely and distinguished speakers, among them Jeff Corbin, Bryan Terrell Clark, Lauren Potter, and Terrence Floyd.
- You were here for our Student Union makeover and the opening of our Multicultural Lounge.
- You experienced the first full year of our MUber Rideshare program.
- You were the first class to enjoy The Roost all four years.
- You participated in our first Unity Walk for Black Lives Matter.

In athletics, you proved yourselves true champions. Despite COVID-19 canceling one year of competition, you were part of one National Championship – way to go women's rowing!, four Regional Championships, 26 NCAA Tournament appearances, and six Conference Championships. Along the way, women's bowling, softball, women's rowing, men's basketball, and women's soccer had the most successful seasons in the history of their programs. In addition, your class had three Conference Champion Scholars and a department GPA of 3.40 – tops in the PSAC all four years!

These days, it seems that no one makes formal remarks without mentioning the global pandemic. People lost opportunities, homes, jobs, even loved ones. On campus, we socially distanced and wore masks while adapting to remote learning and grab-and-go meals. We isolated. We quarantined. We got a little lonely.

But you pushed forward – not necessarily trying to put the pieces back together again but finding ways to create a different path.

I look at you and see the very epitome of Dr. Seuss' time-honored expression: "When something bad happens, you have three choices. You can either let it define you, let it destroy you, or you can let it strengthen you."

You became stronger. That courage and innovative spirit will serve you well as you enter the world beyond our Gates to build your new lives.

Yes, the world is a much different place than when you arrived here. Still, with your Mercyhurst University education you are capable, resourceful, and entirely ready for the challenges ahead.

So, dream unfettered dreams, take some risks, allow yourself to fail, remembering that failure is just one of the steps along the way to success.

My personal code is a combination of optimism and perseverance. I'm not afraid to step back and consider taking a new direction. Many of you may have heard me cite this quote from Robert Brault – It is my go-to:

"An Optimist is someone who figures that taking a step backward after taking a step forward is not a disaster. It's a Cha-Cha."

So, as you Cha-Cha through life, draw on your Mercyhurst experience – what you learned in the classroom, what you experienced on and off this campus, and our core values, which you've internalized and practice every day – sometimes without even recognizing it.

Each of you brings fresh ideas and willing hands to take on the challenges of today's world. You can harness your Mercyhurst education to bring justice and joy to the world.

May God bless you as you move toward your dreams and, please, in your collective memory, treasure, these years at Mercyhurst. Come back and see us. The Gates are always open.

Thank you, Congratulations, and Carpe Diem.