

President William J. Brennan

Convocation 2016

Monday, August 29, 2016

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Maine Maritime Academy's Convocation. My name is Bill Brennan and I am proud to be President of this outstanding institution.

That was a wonderful rendition of our national anthem – thank you so much. I would like to offer a special welcome to our State legislators, Senator Kim Rosen, and her husband, Finance Commissioner Richard Rosen, and State Representative Ralph Chapman. I also want to draw attention to members of our Board of Trustees on the riser with me: Anne Marie Samway, Tom Sawyer and Chairman Bob Somerville. I am also very pleased to welcome Selectmen Peter Vogell, Gus Basile and David Unger as well as Town Manager Jimmy Goodson. And, because they are so important to our safety and welfare, I wish to recognize our firefighters, first responders, ambulance corps and law enforcement officers, including Lt. Roderick Charette of the Maine State Police, Troop J. Thank you so much for joining us.

To the Class of 2020, welcome to Maine Maritime Academy. You have chosen well and I wish you much success with your education here. Start that education by asking yourself, “why did President Brennan jump off the ship with us yesterday?” Is it because he likes swimming in sub-arctic water at eight o'clock on a Sunday morning? I joined you for that jump for two reasons: to demonstrate that we are in this together. That we are one community, a family. We help each other and support one another. The other reason I jumped with you was to demonstrate, in a dramatic way, that you must lead by example. Whether you're in the regiment, or ocean studies or business, our goal is to develop your leadership qualities – to enable you to become successful in your careers and hopefully in your lives.

The year 2016 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of Maine Maritime Academy. We are celebrating this milestone and our history throughout the year. Our theme is all about MMA people: We Are Mariners. We acknowledge the attributes that unite us and make us unique. We celebrate the ways we contribute to our communities and the world. Walking around campus, you will see banners with words describing the qualities that our community embodies: steadfast, disciplined, loyal. We are teammates, we are resilient, we are innovators, and we are passionate. We are one community.

We began this year honoring the memory of the Academy's first graduate with the Academy flag held at half-staff. We celebrated our history on the actual day of our anniversary, March 21, with a student-led ceremony on campus to mark the day when Maine Maritime Academy began. And we followed that with a formal recognition at the State Capitol in Augusta.

We were honored to have General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top military officer in the country, here to deliver a very powerful and memorable Commencement address to the class of 2016 and, in a few weeks, our celebration will continue with an exciting homecoming event.

So, why are we gathered here today? The meaning of the word convocation is a “calling together of the members of a group” for a special purpose. Traditionally, convocation has been used in an academic setting for incoming students to swear an oath to live by and uphold the principles of the school. Our convocation tradition embraces the same fundamental purpose. Today we will ask all of our students to pledge to uphold Maine Maritime Academy’s honor system, a system established by Maine Maritime Academy students and something essential to our mission.

What does the word “honor” mean? At Maine Maritime Academy the word has come to encompass honesty, integrity, truthfulness, tolerance, accountability and the acceptance of the underlying equality of all humans. It is the recognition of personal responsibility for your actions; this is not always easy, but it is fundamentally the right thing to do.

Among the qualities we try to foster here is a respect for self and for others. Your reputation is something that needs to be nurtured and protected and during your time here we will try to ensure that you develop this to the fullest extent. You have chosen a college with a fine reputation which has been made possible by all of the alumni who precede you. Throughout the world, Maine Maritime Academy is known for the excellence of its graduates. These qualities make you highly sought-after in the industry and it is my sincere hope that you will continue the great heritage and uphold our superb reputation.

And so, I ask you to maintain these standards through honor, courage and commitment; through altruism, compassion, friendship and tolerance. And above all, I urge you to conduct yourselves with civility—a basic decency—in your classrooms, your personal communications, and in your collective discussions. I ask also that you are ever-mindful of the fact that your actions leave an indelible impression. Think carefully before you encroach on someone else’s personal boundaries and respect yourself. You are now part of a community, a family that cares for you and that you need to care for.

With me today are all of the folks who make your education possible: the admissions staff, the registrar’s office, the faculty, the waterfront crew, the IT department, the trustees, the Commandant’s office, the medical staff, the grounds crew, custodial services, administrative personnel, the ship’s crew, library staff, the athletic department, food service providers, bookstore staff, career services and many, many others. Every person contributes to your success, no matter the task, and there is not one of us who wouldn’t hesitate to lend you a helping hand. In fact, we in this community will demonstrate our commitment to you, our students, by pledging today to help you uphold your commitment to the academy to act with honor.

I congratulate all of the classes gathered here today, the incoming class of 2020 through to the seniors, Class of 2017. We expect great things of you: we expect you to work hard, play hard, and treat others with respect. Make yourselves proud of who you are and make us proud to have a hand in your education and developing your character. Continue to make us all proud of the Maine Maritime Academy.