Office of the President

Mount St. Mary's University Commencement Address

President Timothy E. Trainor, Ph.D.

May 11, 2024

Thank you so much for the deep honor of being the commencement speaker for the Class of 2024. I want to thank our board of trustees for presenting me with an honorary degree. Moreso, I want to thank our board for entrusting me with the privilege to serve as the 26th president of Mount St. Mary's University. I will forever be grateful. I also want to thank our faculty, staff, and administrators for your support and counsel over these past 8 years. It has been an honor to serve our students together side by side as we carried out our mission. And I want to thank our students here today and all the students I have been with over my time at the Mount for making this job fun! You are awesome!

One of the many benefits of going to college is the chance to meet your future spouse, your partner in living a life of significance. I was one of the lucky ones to meet my future wife, Dr. Donna Brazil while we were classmates at West Point. Our meeting was likely a bit different from other college sweethearts. We were together in a required co-ed physical education class during our sophomore year, a sort of hand-to-hand combat class – hooah! During a drill in class, Donna kneed me in the ribs, and I said, man that's the girl for me! It was love at first kick! And we've been married now for almost 40 years.

Safety note – don't kick someone to get their attention!

Speaking of Donna, as we were discussing thoughts for my talk today, we tried to remember who our commencement speaker was in 1983. We couldn't remember so we looked it up. Our speaker

was Caspar Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense at that time. Obviously, we also can't remember a thing he said, and you likely will not remember what I said today, so I am boiling my message down to three points, what we call the BLUF, or bottom-line up front. You ready?

Three points:

- **Work hard**.
- **Don't be an Eeyore**, and
- **Call home**.

Think you can remember those? Here we go, repeat after me:

- **Work Hard** …(point to students to repeat)
- **Don't be an Eeyore** …(point to students to repeat)
- **Call Home** … (point to students to repeat)

Way to go! Ok, I will explain each a bit…

First, Work Hard. Success requires work; that is not just a pithy phrase on a motivational poster. I truly believe that if you want to succeed at something, you need to put in the work. And I am talking about success broadly, whether it is success in your chosen profession, in your personal relationships as a husband, father, wife, mother, friend, or success in your volunteer service. You need to work hard at each meaningful endeavor in your life. Good things don't come easy.

In my early years in the Army, I had to put in many hours to learn my profession and was generally successful and good at what I did as was Donna. Each new job in the Army required hard work. I remember being on deployment in Sarajevo, Bosnia working seven days a week in a NATO headquarters with service members from 35 different nations. That was an incredible experience for me that I loved, but it required hard work with people from many different cultures to be successful.

Donna and I approach life the same way with our family. We both worked hard to be engaged in our kids' lives at home and, for example, as coaches for their teams. We both started coaching soccer. I never played the game so I'm not sure how successful I was at that! But my goal in this

endeavor and others wasn't only about soccer – it was to be successful as a dad. My kids will be the judges of this.

And later in life, as dean of West Point for six years and now president at the Mount, the work demands have been significant. I won't lie; the last eight years here have been hard work! But, working hard also brings with it the gifts of seeing the success of the organizations and people in which you invest your time and effort.

Keep in mind too that you will also need to pay your dues in a profession. I encounter many young professionals today who are in a rush to get to the C-suite. Don't be. There is a reason that most folks like me in the C-suite have grey hair. We've learned our profession by serving in numerous positions throughout the organization, learning from leaders, both the good and not-so-good leaders. We learned not just about the organization we serve and our professional responsibilities, but also about understanding people better through the life experiences that happen over the course of time. All these experiences are invaluable to learning and preparing you for leading as a member of the C-suite. So, take your time in moving up in whatever profession you choose and enjoy the ride – work hard and when you are ready to lead, the opportunities will present themselves.

Speaking of leadership, in the Army, we are taught to value and focus on the three Cs of leadership: character, competence, and commitment.

As you might expect, I believe character is the most important trait of leadership. You build trust with the people you lead by doing the simple things right. You care about people and do what you say you will do. You live by a set of moral values that guide your decisions. It gets tougher as you move higher in an organization because the issues you deal with become more complex and you have fewer peers to consult. But, as long as you **work hard** and stay true to your values, you will be successful.

A good leader also works hard to be competent at their job. They invest the time to know their trade, both the technical and tactical aspects. Finally, leaders work hard and demonstrate commitment to excellence and to their organization. One of the things I love about serving at the Mount is working with employees that are committed to our success and the success of our

students. Commitment is hard work. Part of that is fighting through the trenches so to speak and remaining committed as you move up in the organization. So, remember, **WORK HARD!**

Ok, do you remember the second point? Yes, **Don't be an Eeyore**? I loved the Winnie the Pooh characters and movies when our kids were young. While Tigger was my favorite, I most remember the character of Eeyore. He was the sad donkey always glum. We all have known an Eeyore in our life. Sometimes referred to as 'Debbie-downers', Eeyore's can drag the mood of all around them down. I'm sure you have met people like this. But the good news is that the opposite is also true.

I learned early in the Army that enthusiasm is contagious, and people feed off it. Army life is definitely not glamorous and can frankly suck at times when, for example, you are living outside for days on end exposed to the elements with lousy food and little sleep. Veterans with us today know what I am talking about. Despite the conditions, a positive attitude can help you and those around you. People will feed off your enthusiasm.

This is especially important in a crisis. In a crisis, people are drawn to those who provide direction and a way forward out of the crisis. During the early days of the Covid pandemic, no one could confidently say they knew what we were facing, how dangerous the virus was, or how long it would last. I certainly could not. It was easy then to be an Eeyore. However, early in this crisis, I credit our Chief Financial Officer, Bill Davies, with giving me some advice that helped me envision our future. He said we need a set of guiding principles for our response and way forward. That night I wrote those guiding principles and used them as the framework for all the Mount's plans throughout the Covid crisis to set a positive direction for our future. With these in hand, I felt I could develop and talk positively about a path forward and out of the crisis for the Mount.

The other technique I used to instill positivity during Covid was to talk and write about hope in every message to our community. When times are bad, I believe the worst thing that can happen is to lose hope.

Speaking of hope, one of my most memorable Army tours of duty was on a long construction mission in Honduras as part of a 1,000 service-member task force. Prior to our deployment, I went there as part of a small team to negotiate for use of the pastureland on which we would

build our temporary basecamp. We went to the small mud brick home of the woman who owned the land in the poor town of San Lorenzo. I remember sitting in her small living area and seeing displayed most prominently and reverently on the wall a crucifix and a picture of President John F. Kennedy; the significant combination of religious faith, and hope in the US as a bastion of freedom and prosperity really stuck with me.

You will be faced with tough times in the future. When you are, remain positive and remember our university motto, Spes Nostra, Our Hope. And **Don't be an Eeyore!**

Ok, last point, do you remember? Yes, **Call Home**. By home, I am referring to that feeling of comfort and security you have when connected to the people and places most meaningful to you. Most of us are fortunate to have a family that we were given, or one that we have made, and they provide us with that sense of home I am describing. Stay connected to these people and places throughout your life. That's what I mean by "call home".

The singer Billy Joel describes other ways to think of the concept of home in his song, *You're my home*. My wife and I served our first tour together in the Army in West Germany in the 1980's far from our homes and well before cell phones. Yes, that was before the Berlin Wall came down. We had to find this sense of home together at a young age in other ways far away from our families. We found it in each other and new friends. Go figure, our wedding song was *You're My Home* by Billy Joel.

You can also find this sense of home in places. I always felt at home at Mass, in Church. The Army can be a lonely place to be at times. The typical Soldier moves frequently and is often away from family and friends. I found this to be the case, however I also quickly discovered that I always felt at home in Church, regardless of where the Mass was celebrated. I have attended Mass in remote locations around the world, sometimes with a rifle slung over my back. I felt at home in Mass whether in an elaborate Cathedral in Europe or in a tent in the desert in Iraq. I remember attending a high Mass said in Italian with lots of incense in of all places, Sarajevo, Bosnia on a NATO base we shared with many nations. I've attended Mass said in Mandarin in Beijing. All provided me with a sense of feeling at home. So, in some of my loneliest times, attending Mass was like being home. I encourage you to stay connected to a place of meaning that you equate with feeling home.

Call home is also about connection. Know that those who got you here still want to be part of your life. Our kids are 33, 31, and 29 years old now but we still like to hear from them. Every morning, we each strive to do the New York Times mini-crossword puzzle and Wordle and report our times in a family text chat. Donna and I get humbled all the time by the speed of our kids on these. But it's not about winning. This is our way of doing a quick daily pulse check to know each of us is ok. And it can be fun. So, stay connected and call home!

Alright guys, we're in the homestretch! What are the three points again? One - yes **work hard.** Two, **don't be an Eeyore**, and three, yes, **call home**!

I hope you took something away from my time with you today, and from our four years together here at the Mount.

Thank you for making my time at the Mount special. I am confident in our future because of who I see before me and the thousands of students who graduated during my time at the Mount. Go forth and do good things. May God bless each and every one of you and Go Mount!