

Convocation 2017

Welcome remarks from Dean/Director William L. MacDonald

Students, welcome to Convocation and welcome to The Ohio State University at Newark. It's time to celebrate the start of the academic year. I am accompanied by wonderful people here on the platform and in the seats over here to my right, and I am excited to introduce them to you. I ask the following people to stand. Sharad Thakkar, Chair of the Ohio State Newark Board, members of the Ohio State Newark faculty, and finally, members of the Ohio State Newark staff and members of my Cabinet. Please join me in welcoming them with a round of applause.

Students, all of the members of our faculty, staff, and Board care deeply about your experience at Ohio State, and we appreciate the commitment you are making to your education, this campus, and the university. My remarks today are about what that commitment means, and I must say that they are not the remarks I would have made a few weeks ago. My message today has an element of sobriety that has not been present in the welcomes I have delivered at previous Convocations.

Let me start by asking you to think back to last year, when you were thinking about where you would attend college.

Through our marketing and recruiting, we asked you a question, a question that in the past week and a half has taken on incredible significance. We asked, "Will it be you?" That question is an

open one. “Will it be you to... what?” You might have multiple answers for it. We even suggested some. And now, with the university’s motto, “education for citizenship,” in mind, and with the unacceptable acts of neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and white nationalists in mind, I ask you to answer it by saying “It will be me to condemn racism and stand up for my classmates.” You are a Buckeye now, and Buckeyes are not bystanders.

You are part of a student body that is incredibly diverse, the most diverse of any Ohio State campus. We celebrate that diversity because, although you are certainly going to learn from all of us up here on this platform, the sea of diversity in which you are swimming will present amazing opportunities for you to learn from each other. You are going to form life-long relationships that cross ethnic, racial, religious, gender, political, and all sorts of other cultural lines.

Considering the hatred we have seen from neo-Nazis, white supremacists and the like, I cannot overemphasize the importance of understanding and respecting others who are different from you. And I ask you to say more than “It will be me to understand; it will be me to respect.” I ask you to respond, “It will be me to stand up.”

The amazing leadership women displayed when they marched on Washington DC last January is a great example of standing up. They stood up for all of us. And to those of you who, like me, are white males, I invite you to join me as a full partner in supporting women and minorities. My advice, as I stand up to racism, sexism, and homophobia, is to start by listening and by asking. Our socialization occurred in a society structured to prevent us from easily seeing what life is

like for women and minorities. No matter how committed to the cause we are, we need to ask for help to see those structures clearly, to see around them, and to change them. Ultimately, we need to act, but we cannot know what to do until we have listened to others who know more than we do.

To all of our first-years, I challenge you to find someone who seems to be different from you and ask them about their lives. There will be plenty of opportunities. You can attend one of our Crucial Conversations, a series our director of student multicultural affairs, Vorley Taylor, will be hosting. You can attend the cultural mixer that is one of our Welcome Week activities. At the picnic this evening, find fellow students you have never met and ask them to tell you about themselves. And here's a great idea. In a moment, you are going to hear from Dr. Tiyi Morris, whose research on the civil rights movement is relevant to all of us. Take one of her courses or buy her book. For some of us, including me, that would be a good way to listen and learn.

There are times when you need to stand up immediately. Some things will be so blatantly wrong that you will be compelled to say something. The activities of the white supremacists and similar groups in Charlottesville is one of those things. People at the highest level of our government should have stood up and did not. They were bystanders, and did not live up to the standards of a Buckeye. I am not joking when I tell you that I feel like those of us up here on the platform are the members of the Ministry of Magic warning others that Voldemort, aka racism, was never gone, has gained strength, and is mobilizing his death eaters. What the white supremacists did in Charlottesville was an abhorrence, and their activities at the University of Virginia were hostile to college campuses everywhere. If you witness anything on the continuum of mistreatment toward any group, please report it to the appropriate office. We will soon send an email out to the

campus community listing the resources we have available for such circumstances. And I encourage you to read the guidance the Southern Poverty Law Center has made available on its website.

Remember, we are all on the same team. We are all Buckeyes. We are diverse and we are one.

I have to confess that I struggled to bring some levity to my Convocation remarks. I thought that one way might be to bake a cake like the one Tina Fey used in her Saturday Night Live skit. So I did. I really love cake, and I totally succumb to real buttercream frosting, but I didn't have time to make that. What you see here is admittedly subpar for my own cooking standards, but it is a nice testament to my wife's cake-decorating skills. I baked it, she decorated it. And I am happy to share it. I would eat it like Tina Fey did, but I don't want to mess up everyone's gowns. If you didn't see the skit, just Google Tina Fey and cake. The skit is about taking out your frustrations and keeping yourself safe, and about taking action. I will share it with you at the picnic.

Students, you are about to begin an amazing journey, and I hope that when you reach your destination, you look back at your time at Ohio State with tremendous pleasure. Have a great year!