



May 10, 2024

## Undergraduate Commencement Speech

President Kathleen A. Getz, Ph.D.

Good afternoon!

And a warm welcome to Mercyhurst University Trustees, Administrators, Faculty and Staff, Sisters of Mercy, invited guests, families, friends, those joining us via livestream, and, most importantly, to the Mercyhurst University Class of 2024. 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.

Before we go any further, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the absence of one of your classmates, Joey Talarico, who passed away last summer. Joey was a dual major in Intelligence Studies and International Relations, a coxswain for the Men's Rowing Team, a bookstore employee, and a member of the Honors Program. His passing has left a profound void in our hearts, so much so that as your senior gift you chose to establish a scholarship in Joey's name.

Let's take a moment to remember him.

Like all our graduating classes, your class has shared unique and memorable experiences during the past four years. But your experiences were not entirely typical – in some cases, they were historic.

- It was during your senior year that Mercyhurst University became a Division I school, raising the bar not only for our student-athletes but for our entire community of fans.
- You were here as we unveiled the first in a series of 12 historic markers that will be installed on campus as part of our Centennial celebration in 2026.
- Then, there was the eclipse. There was so much enthusiasm generated for that once-in-a-lifetime event. Like you, I didn't know quite what to expect. But, if you were here in the path of the totality, you know the experience more than lived up to the hype.
- Of course, your Mercyhurst career didn't start out on such a heavenly note; you arrived on campus at the height of COVID-19, and you were met with virtual classes, social distancing, and quarantines. You probably saw enough sanitizing wipes to last a lifetime.
- But as the pandemic eased, campus life began its resurgence.
- Our student-athletes emerged as true champions.
  - You were part of one National Championship – way to go women's rowing!

- four Regional Championships
- 26 NCAA Tournament appearances,
- and seven Conference Championships.
- In addition, your class had five Conference Champion Scholars and a department GPA of 3.40 – tops in the PSAC all four years.
- Then, as part of your commitment to service, you served as sports envoys to school children throughout our community, launching the Shamrock Sports Club, an intramural program for Erie’s elementary school students, and the Junior Lakers Kids Club, a program to encourage more community spectators at our sporting events.
- You may remember experiencing our first and only outdoor Springfest shortly before final exams in 2022.

There were other firsts:

- You participated in our first Mercy March to show our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice.
- You experienced the first year of STUNT, and renovations to the Mercyhurst Athletic Center.
- You brought amazing speakers to campus, like Anthony Robles, an NCAA champion wrestler born with one leg, and Autumn Rose Williams, a Native American plus-size model.
- You were here for our Student Union makeover and the opening of our Multicultural Lounge.
- You were among the first customers to enjoy our MUber Rideshare program.

I could go on, but now, as you stand at the threshold of a new beginning, a commencement, it’s important to reflect not only on your achievements and the memories you will take with you, but also on the world you are inheriting.

We live in a time of unprecedented technological progress and tech-facilitated connectivity, yet so many people, especially young adults, feel isolated, due in part to a pervasive climate of divisiveness and polarization.

In the face of these challenges, it can be tempting to retreat into our comfort zones, to surround ourselves only with those who share our beliefs and perspectives. I urge you to resist that temptation. Instead, embrace the diversity of thought and experience that surrounds you.

Charting your path in a climate of divisiveness requires courage, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to dialogue and understanding. It means being willing to engage with those with whom you disagree, not with the intent to convince or convert, but with the genuine desire to learn and grow.

So, as you step out there into the world, dream unfettered dreams, take some risks, allow yourself to fail, remembering that failure is just one of the steps along the way to success. You may have heard me cite this quote from Robert Brault – “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 practiced 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, Carpe Diem!