



Assumption University

President Greg Weiner Remarks, Graduate Class of 2024 Commencement, Assumption University

Provost Guerra, Fr. Chi Ai, Chairperson Race, Ms. Clancey, Dean Schandel, Dean Cullen, faculty, family, friends, and, most important, our soon-to-be graduates: Welcome. Family and friends, I know our graduates join me in thanking you for the support and patience and encouragement that have brought them to this day. I know they join me in thanking your faculty and deans for being mentors and sounding boards and cheerleaders and beyond. And I know everyone here associated with Assumption joins me in thanking you for the gift you gave us when you entrusted us with your graduate educations.

Your programs of study have not aimed at comprehensive education. You've already had that. You are here because you sought to master a specific subject or to advance your studies in it. But you also exemplify

Assumption's mission statement, and I want to read to you one excerpt in particular:

“Assumption University ... awaken[s] in students a sense of wonder, discovery, and purpose, forming graduates known for their intellectual seriousness, thoughtful citizenship, and devotion to the common good.”

You are here because you were already awakened to wonder, discovery, and purpose. I hope we nurtured that, and I hope the impulse toward learning as a way rather than a stage of life continues for you. But I hope we have also challenged you to think in deep and enduring ways about what it means to be intellectually serious—to approach learning with the courage to say what others have not considered and the humility to hear what you can discover from them.

I hope you will enter or advance in your professions as more thoughtful citizens because your faculty have helped make you more thoughtful people. And I hope your devotion to the common good has deepened—not because we have preached to you about what it is but rather because what you have been taught by faculty who ask questions like what is truly common and what is truly good.

When I interview faculty for positions at Assumption, one of my stock questions—this will be an insider tip for those of you who ever interview here—is how teaching their discipline would be different at a Catholic liberal arts institution than somewhere else. One common answer, and a thoughtful one, is that a Catholic institution cares about ethics. We do.

But I trust that business programs at large public institutions are not teaching students greed, or at least not admitting it, and that clinical programs at those schools are not teaching how to manipulate patients.

A fuller answer, as I hope you've both experienced and will practice, is that Assumption—which is both Catholic and a University—arises from the principle that being created in the Divine Image means we are oriented toward the use of reason and speech for what our mission statement calls the pursuit of truth in the company of friends.

You will be different businesspeople, different clinicians, different counselors, different educators and more because of your devotion not simply to the acquisition of skills but also to the pursuit of truth in the company of friends. And you are either entering into or advancing in professions, and a world, that needs both.

I am neither a clinician nor a counselor. But as a parent and an educator, I feel confident saying that our society is experiencing an epidemic of isolation and loneliness, and you, as Assumption alumni, will play an indispensable role in addressing it.

Much of that loneliness arises from the lingering effects of the pandemic. I'm sure some of it is that, depending on your degree of technical skill, it's easier to deal with screens than with people.

I think a better answer comes from one of the luminaries of my field, political theory, and that is Alexis de Tocqueville. He observed how much easier it is to deal with abstractions—like justice or global citizenship—than with the messy people, by which I mean “other” people, with whom we share homes and neighborhoods and workplaces.

Tocqueville did not know much of what you know whether about managing people or cultivating mental health. But I'll venture to say he was on to something. We need to rediscover the idea of friendship. Not transactional friendship, nor simply the friendship of being in one another's company. I mean what Aristotle or Cicero would call true friendship, which is the shared pursuit of things that are enduring and meaningful.

Your graduate education at Assumption has prepared you to engage in that kind of friendship, to model it, to teach it, to encourage it.

Whether your professions involve the responsible creation of wealth or the cultivation of mental health, whether you will practice them in institutions of education or of health, I hope you help us to overcome this epidemic of isolation. You can do it by managing people. You can do it by treating patients, or teaching or counseling students. You can do it by doing exactly what your graduate education here has empowered you to do.

The world yearns for you to heal those in pain. It needs you to build businesses. Most of all, our world is waiting for you, Assumption graduates, to help us rediscover friendship. I hope we've helped equip you with the tools. I know you have helped to shape us. I know, as you join the ranks of Assumption alumni—tens of thousands strong—who will always consider Assumption home, that we are grateful to you. Celebrate today, as we celebrate you. Accept our congratulations. Most of all, on behalf of the people and the neighborhoods, the schools and workplaces, you will infuse with deep friendship, please accept our thanks. Congratulations.