

Ouachita Baptist University
130th Commencement – May 13, 2017

Dr. Ben R. Sells, President

Class of 2017, congratulations!

You completed a rigorous liberal arts program.

You studied with talented faculty and worked alongside committed staff.

You served your classmates, your campus, and your community.

You studied around the globe and ministered across the world.

You completed serious research and presented important scholarship.

You performed and created works of music and art.

You experienced community in the residence halls and fellowship in the cafeteria.

You competed well against other schools athletically and academically.

You worshipped in Chapel, Refuge, and Noonday.

You performed in Tiger Tunes, and played in Tiger Traks.

You worked hard and had fun.

You made lifelong friends.

You're older and wiser.

You're ready for service and success.

You finished.

We're proud of you!

One of Ouachita's traditions is that the president often gives the Commencement Address. As the new president, I have to wonder about the origins of this tradition.

Perhaps it's a way to save money. Maybe it's an attempt to shorten the ceremony.

Across the country, there are Commencement speeches being given by more well-known people and more articulate speakers.

However, I have chosen to maintain this tradition for three reasons.

One, to save money. Two, to shorten the ceremony.

Three, and more importantly, because this ceremony is the capstone of your Ouachita experience—and because you're a captive audience—I feel a responsibility to summarize:

- our ideals for what Ouachita represents,
- our view of Ouachita alumni, and
- our hopes for you.

More than anything else, I want you to know that we're interested in keeping a lifelong relationship with you.

Of course, you'll forever be marked by Ouachita.

You'll name Ouachita on your resume, on your social media profiles, and when people ask where you graduated, and much more.

When you leave campus today, we want you to leave knowing one thing for certain: you'll always be welcomed back.

Whether you return this fall for Homecoming or twenty years from now for a class reunion.

Whether you succeeded or struggled in life. Or whether you live nearby or far away.

The lamp of your alma mater's love will always be on the Cone-Bottoms window sill, awaiting your return and beckoning you back.

Graduation means you are only leaving the campus, not the University.

For you, from now on, Ouachita is not only defined by what happens within the confines of this campus but by where you go and what you do.

You see, wherever Ouachita alumni live, Ouachita lives.

We'll watch your progress and hope to hear from you about the milestones of your lives.

When you return, bring back your experience and your talents. We'll always be in need of them.

When you see your chosen profession or calling changing to adapt to new realities or emerging opportunities, let us know so that we can help current and coming generations of students prepare accordingly. Be our eyes and ears for the future. We will become the students, you the teachers.

I have the privilege of speaking regularly to Ouachita alumni. When I do, I pose the question, "What's the most important contribution you can make as an alumnus?"

Most people expect me to say, "Make a gift." And, I reply, "That's a good answer, but not the best answer."

Allow me to suggest this answer about the most important contribution you can make as an alumnus: live-out the vision and mission of Ouachita.

They are reprinted on the last page of the program, so allow me to summarize. Be intentional about cultivating four qualities in your lives:

- increasing in your love of God and love of learning,
- exemplifying intellectual and spiritual growth,
- undertaking meaningful work, and
- demonstrating reasoned engagement with the world.

As you do, you'll serve the purposes of God in your generation through your family, career, community, and church—across this nation and around the world.

As you do, you'll find deep personal satisfaction.

As you do, the light of your example will forever distinguish you and the University you represent.

As you exemplify Ouachita to a watching world, we'll endeavor to pray for, support, and ask how we can help you.

I believe the Ouachita mission will matter more than ever before in the generations to come.

As a result, we'll endeavor to provide opportunities for you to be involved with Ouachita—to help us dream a larger dream for your University.

We'll need your wisdom, faith, knowledge, and involvement in sustaining and amplifying the Ouachita mission; to keep Ouachita, Ouachita; and to make it stronger and better for the many students who will follow you.

The words I have just shared with you reflect my role as Ouachita's President to you as Ouachita's newest graduates.

Allow me to close with a few words as a friend and as a brother in Christ, words that I've found especially meaningful in the past year.

The words aren't mine, but they reflect my deepest hopes for you.

They were written and spoken in 1721 by a young Christian college graduate. He became one of our country's most notable theologians and philosophers. His name was Jonathan Edwards.

He exhibited a deep personal piety, commitment to the local church, and a heart for missions.

Indeed, the biographies of his life consistently illustrate that he exemplified the vision and mission of Ouachita.

In Edwards' 1721 sermon, he posed the question, "Why should Christians be happy?" He responded with these three

answers—three answers I commend to you:

- The bad things will turn out for good.
- The good things can never be taken away.
- The best things are yet to come.

Because we live in a fallen world, bad things happen, but we know that for those who love the Lord, they will ultimately turn out for good.

We know that the truly good things—such as fellowship with God—can't be taken away from you.

And, we know that the best things—such as life in heaven—are yet to come.

You'll take Ouachita with you wherever you go. Live out our Christ-centered vision and mission, and live in the light of why Christians should be truly happy.

As you do, you'll find personal contentment, you'll serve the common good, and you'll help advance the Kingdom.

When we look at you—and remember all that you have done and consider all that you will do—it's been our privilege to live and learn with you.

Our hearts are full. Our cups runneth over. We love you!

May God bless each of you today and throughout all your endeavors that honor the Lord; may God bless this country; and may God continue to bless Ouachita Baptist University.

Thank you.