

Undergraduate Commencement 2016

- June 12, 2016
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Welcome to KeyArena on whose court Redhawks win and where today, on that same court, you, our graduating students, win in an even bigger and more important way. From my heart I thank you for being our students.

Welcome to parents and families, partners and friends who cheer on your graduating students. You too are winners today. I thank you on behalf of the university which has been a partner with you these years in the support and the education of your students and ours. You kept the faith that this day would come. Enjoy it!

Welcome professors, advisers, mentors, coaches, trustees, regents... all servants of the achievement of these graduating students. I am proud to support your work, your dedication, as president. Yours is the accomplishment; to you belongs the gratitude.

I wish I had an app, something like Google Earth, but this one “Google Hope”. An app which would survey the world and locate the places of the greatest accumulation of hope. I believe on this day my “Google Hope” would look onto this arena at this time as the brightest hotspot of hope anywhere in our region, our country, and beyond. All surveys of university students today show that, while they are very low in their hope for our country, they are very high in their hope for what they personally will do to change our world, to make a difference, to brighten the lives of others. Personal hope is high among you. We need your hope.

Hope needs a partner. It is exceptionally well exemplified in Geoffrey Canada, the honorary degree recipient and your commencement speaker, whom I will introduce in a moment. He was once a graduating student with hope against all odds. He partnered that hope with something else, something hope needs. The biography of his life and work says it well in its title Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America and even in the last name of that biographer, Paul Tough. What hope needs as a partner is indeed something “tough”, “whatever it takes”, hard work to bring about the change you our graduates are so hopeful you will have. You have whatever it takes, you are tough, you have shown that you are willing to do hard work, by the very fact that you are here today receiving your well-deserved degrees.

If there were an app called “Google Hope” which could lock in on the hotspots of hope, I don’t think there could be one called “Google Hard Work” or “Google Whatever It Takes” or “Google Tough” because it would need to focus everywhere, and always, and evenly: in a job, in a neighborhood, in a home, in a school, in a social service agency, in a church, in a hospital, with friends, with colleagues, with kids, with partners. “Google Tough” would need to fill the screen; no place unlit, no place cold, all places hot.

I believe in you—your hope and your hard work—we believe in you. Geoffrey Canada is here because he believes in you. Let me introduce him by reading the citation by which he is granted an honorary doctorate from your university and then let’s all listen to him.