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Commencement Address at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, Wisconsin

May 14, 2004

Thank you all very much. Dr. Ferry, members of the faculty, trustees, and families, distinguished guests, most importantly, members of the Class of 2004, I appreciate the warm welcome to this fine university and to this great State. Thank you for such a wonderful welcome. I am honored to be with you on graduation day as you become proud alumni of CUW.

I thank you as well for the honorary degree. I kind of like the sound, "Dr. Bush." [*Laughter*] I don't think Laura is going to call me that. [*Laughter*]

My congratulations to my fellow honorees today, especially General Vessey, a fine officer who served our country with distinction and honor.

I'm here today with one of your alumni, Class of 2000. He can't rise for applause because he's working. But I want his parents to know he's doing a really fine job. And everyone at Concordia can be very proud of Officer Scott Eichstaedt of the United States Secret Service.

I am told that when the name of your commencement speaker was announced on April the 1st—[*laughter*]—a lot of students thought it might be an April Fool's Day joke. [*Laughter*] And some of you may still have doubts. I saw a person when I walked in, said, "Is it him, or is it the guy on 'Saturday Night Live'?" [*Laughter*]

All of you have worked hard and have come far, and you can always be proud of the achievement we mark today. Through it all, you've had a lot of fine people standing with you. This graduating class is a credit to the superb and caring teachers at Concordia. And today we also honor the people who believed in you and prayed for you and paid for you—[*laughter*]—the parents of the Class of 2004.

Many of today's graduates are on your way to full-time ministry, and that commitment is one of the greatest that a man or woman can make. All of the graduates leave Concordia with a commission and a calling. In the Lutheran tradition, all work in an office, on a farm, in the home, or in the halls of government, should be done in the glory of God. And that is accomplished by doing our work with excellence and care and an awareness of the needs around us.

We find our examples in great lives. Important work in this world can be done by towering figures like Martin Luther, who changed history and your own lives with an act of conscience. Work of lasting value can also be done by a solitary soul, condemned and stripped of all power, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Every life holds the possibility of serving God. And in every great life, that possibility is realized in service. After all, Bonhoeffer said, "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others."

This teaching of faith is confirmed in our daily experience. Many of us find that there is much more to life than getting and keeping. True fulfillment comes with the responsibilities we assume, to care for our families and to love a neighbor as we want to be loved ourselves. This is more than a familiar saying; it is the foundation of a meaningful life.

A person shows his or her character in kindness and charity, and what is true in our lives is also true in the life of our Nation. You can fairly judge the character of society by how it treats the weak, the vulnerable, the most easily forgotten. Our own country, at its best, strives to be compassionate, and this isn't easy. Compassion is not merely a vague feeling of empathy; it is a demanding virtue. It involves action and effort and deep conviction, a conviction as old as Scripture and present at the founding of our country. We believe that everyone has a place and

a purpose in this world, that every life matters, that no insignificant person was ever born.

America rejects the ethic of sink or swim. America rejects social Darwinism, because strength is not the same as worth. Our greatest failures as a nation have come when we lost sight of our compassionate ideals in slavery, in segregation, and in every wrong that has denied the value and dignity of life. Our greatest strength as a nation is that we bravely face our flaws and do our best to make things right. Our greatest successes as a nation have come when we broadened the circle of protection and inclusion, and this work is not finished. We will press on until every person shares in the promise of our country.

The mission statement of this university directs each of you towards a life of service to the church and to the world. It's not my place to tell you how best to serve the church, but I do have a few thoughts about how you can make your mark in the world. Wherever you are headed, I urge you to do the work nearest you and help to build a more compassionate society.

First, America needs your efforts and energy in the fight against poverty and despair. A compassionate society does not look away from a man being dragged down by addiction or a mother being abandoned by the father of the child or boys and girls with no role models in life who wonder if anyone cares about them. These personal tragedies are often failures of love, and they must be answered with love and caring and kindness. Government can play many important roles, but it cannot take someone's hand and be their friend. You have that power. If you follow this calling, you can help transform our society, one heart, one soul at a time.

This call is heard and followed here in the Milwaukee area at Lutheran Counseling and Family Services. It was founded over 100 years ago to help children in need. Today, it offers services and counseling that help teens and preteens escape drug and alcohol abuse. When children hurt this deeply and this early, they often need an entirely new path, a new way. The CEO of the program, Dr. Chuck Meseck, says this: "The clinical work is important, but in helping a person, faith is what really heals them completely."

Around our country, there are so many people with loving hearts who despair at the suffering they see around them. And so I made a decision: Instead of ignoring or resenting religious charities and faith-based groups, this country will encourage these good works in every way we can. The Federal Government now allows faith-based groups to compete for billions of dollars in social service funding without being forced to change their identity and their mission. We must support the best, the most effective sources of compassion and hope, and we will not discriminate against people of faith.

Second, America needs your good heart in meeting a basic responsibility, to protect and honor life in all its seasons. A compassionate society shows a special concern for those at the beginning of life, those at the end of life, and those who struggle in life with disabilities. Most of you, at some point, will be called to care for a dying relative or a frail and aging parent or someone close to you with a terrible sickness. Often, in their pain and loneliness, they will feel they are nothing but a burden and worthless to the world, and you will need to show them that's not true. Our worth as human beings does not depend on our health or productivity or independence or any other shifting value the world might apply. Our worth comes from bearing the image of our Maker. And the hardest times of your life may be the most important, when you bear witness to this truth by your sacrifice and loving kindness to another soul.

This commitment to the value of every life also challenges our society. Technologies that have extended life also make treatment decisions harder at the end of life. New methods of research hold promise in treating disease. These innovations show the resourcefulness of humanity, and they must be guided by all the wisdom of humanity. Our standards must be high and clear and fixed. Life is not just a tool or a commodity or a means to other ends. Nothing good or just can be built on the destruction or suffering of others.

These convictions have deep roots in our Nation's founding. Our Declaration of Independence calls life an endowment of the Creator, and on Earth, an unalienable right. Applying this belief has always been a test of

our democracy. Your education has prepared you to add to these debates with respect for others and with confidence in your own beliefs. By your voice and by your example, all of you can help to build a culture of life in America.

Third, America needs your idealism to show the good heart of our country to the whole world. A compassionate society sees needs and suffering beyond its borders and cares enough to act. Americans show this care by adopting orphans from other lands, by resettling tens of thousands of refugees each year, by sending surgeons and dentists on medical missions, by spending years living among and serving people in faraway countries. The kingdom you serve is not bounded by coasts or rivers or checkpoints. The hymns you sing are sung in every language. The needs of all the world are your concern, and I hope that, with your generous spirit and global vision, you will point the way for others.

The moral ideals of America are also universal. Because we believe in the rights and dignity of our own citizens, we believe in the rights and dignity of people everywhere. So in Africa and elsewhere, we are leading the fight against AIDS and other diseases. Where there is famine, our country provides food. Where there is desperate poverty, our country provides developmental aid. Where there is natural disaster, even in hostile nations, America is eager to help. And where there is tyranny, oppression, and gathering danger to mankind, America works and sacrifices for peace and freedom. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is the Almighty God's gift to all humanity.

At this hour, our fellow citizens are sacrificing for the security and freedom of Afghanistan and Iraq. Their mission is like others we have given to past generations in our military, to defeat the violent and to rescue the innocent. The mission of our military is also vital to the interests of America. We will not allow Afghanistan and Iraq to fall under the control of radicals and terrorists who are intent on our own destruction. On these matters, the compassion and the vital interests of our country speak as one: For the sake of peace and for the sake of security, we stand strong for freedom.

The great events of these historic times can seem remote and beyond the control of individuals. Yet, we have recently seen how much difference, for good or ill, the choices of individual men and women can make. In Iraq, the cruelty of a few has brought discredit to their uniform and embarrassment to our country. The consequences of their failures of character reach well beyond the walls of a prison. Yet, those failures cannot diminish the honor and achievement of more than 200,000 military personnel who have served in Iraq since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The character of the men and women who wear our uniform has been shown in countless acts of goodness and decency and unselfish courage. Our American military comes from all parts of the country. Six are members of the graduating class, and we thank them all.

One person can do so much harm or so much good. One person can show the compassion and character of a whole country in an hour of testing. Never doubt that you can make a difference, because the call that comes to you is yours alone. And a great deal depends upon your answer. By bringing care and hope into other lives, you can fill your own life with purpose. By caring for life at every stage, you can make our country a more just and welcoming place. By showing the generosity of America, you can help change the world. Each of you has gifts to offer, and I am confident you will use those gifts where they are needed.

I wish you well on the journey ahead. I thank you for the warm welcome and the honorary degree. I leave today a proud member of the Concordia University Wisconsin Class of 2004.

May God bless you. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. in the field house. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Dr. Patrick T. Ferry, president, Concordia University Wisconsin; and Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., USA (Ret.), former chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Proclamation 7785—National Defense Transportation Day and National Transportation Week, 2004

May 14, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Each year, America's transportation system helps many travelers reach their destinations and carries more than 16 billion tons of freight worth almost $12 trillion. In addition, our transportation systems play a critical role in deploying and sustaining our troops and their equipment around the world.

Throughout our history, advances in transportation have been at the forefront of progress. Last December, we celebrated the centennial of the Wright Brothers' first flight in North Carolina. The pioneering work of the Wright Brothers and subsequent improvements in aviation ushered in new eras of freedom and captured the imaginations of people around the world.

Today, our Nation proudly continues this tradition of innovation in all transportation fields. As we observe National Defense Transportation Day and National Transportation Week, we continue to modernize transportation, and we honor transportation professionals who help to keep our transportation systems secure, efficient, and reliable.

To recognize the men and women who work in the transportation industry and who contribute to our Nation's well-being and defense, the Congress, by joint resolution approved May 16, 1957, as amended (36 U.S.C. 120), has designated the third Friday in May of each year as "National Defense Transportation Day," and, by joint resolution approved May 14, 1962, as amended (36 U.S.C. 133), declared that the week during which that Friday falls be designated as "National Transportation Week."

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Friday, May 21, 2004, as National Defense Transportation Day and May 16 through May 22, 2004, as National Transportation Week.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-eighth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., May 18, 2004]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 15, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on May 19.

Proclamation 7786—National Hurricane Preparedness Week, 2004

May 14, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Hurricanes are among nature's most powerful forces, bringing destructive winds, tornadoes, and floods from torrential rains and ocean storm surges. Each year, several hurricanes develop off American shores in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico. Some of these strike the United States coastline every year, causing numerous fatalities and costing billions of dollars in damage. Many Americans are vulnerable to the dangers of these storms.

In recent years, advances in how we predict and track these storms have improved preparedness and saved lives, but people living in hurricane-prone areas still must be prepared. The National Hurricane Center within the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recommends developing a family disaster plan, creating a disaster supply kit, and staying aware of current weather situations.

While citizens make preparations to keep themselves safe, the Federal Government is maintaining our commitment to improve forecasts to provide advance warning and to coordinate effective emergency response. The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency is also working on a plan to better position disaster equipment and supplies, so Federal resources to support local emergency services arrive quickly.