Chancellor, members of the Board of Regents, colleagues, and guests from near and far: thank you for being here today to celebrate our graduates and the cultural, economic, and social impact Memorial University continues to have on Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, and the world we share.

It is an honour and privilege to serve as Memorial's 16th President and Vice Chancellor.

To the graduating class of 2025 — congratulations. Thank you for choosing Memorial as a partner in your learning. I'm incredibly proud of your achievements and delighted to share this day with you and your loved ones.

Graduates: this is your moment. A moment that captures your struggles, sacrifices, and victories. This is yours to seize, to shape, and to remember.

Since 1949, when Memorial gained degree-granting status, over 156,000 graduates have been launched into the world — many staying right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, strengthening the economic and social fabric of our communities. Today, across three ceremonies, we will celebrate 973 new graduates, each with a story of purpose, resilience, struggle, and triumph.

These stories are rarely written alone. They rest on a foundation of support — people who inspire and enable us to go further than we thought possible. Graduates, please take a moment to thank the friends, parents, guardians, faculty, staff, funders and mentors who helped you get here. This celebration belongs to them, too.

Each of us has someone who's made a significant difference in our journey. For me, one of those people was my late father. As I step into this new role, I'm keenly aware this is the first major milestone I've reached without him. His legacy lives on, however, in three guiding principles he passed down — principles that continue to inspire me, my brothers, and his seven grandchildren.

I want to share them with you today because, like mine, the architecture of your legacy will be built from the people, lessons, and experiences that have shaped you.

First: Work Hard

My dad believed that doing hard things builds strength — much like resistance training.

Entrepreneur and writer Nat Eliason once wrote: "Our self-image is composed of historical evidence of our abilities. The more hard things you push yourself to do, the more competent you will see yourself to be."

Earning a university degree is hard. And you did it. That's worth celebrating. But don't stop here. The world is complex and often unfair — it needs people willing to take on tough challenges.

Second: Do the Right Thing

Peter Parker reminded us that: “With great power comes great responsibility.” But he also noted that: “It’s the choices that make us who we are, and we can always choose to do what’s right.”

Doing the right thing isn’t always easy. Sometimes it means standing alone. Sometimes it means being uncomfortable or giving something up. But whether it’s speaking up, owning a mistake, or showing kindness when no one’s watching — do the right thing anyway. It’s always worth it.

Third and finally: Give Back

In my family, volunteering wasn’t optional — for my parents, it was a way of life. Giving back creates meaning, builds community, and reminds us we are part of something larger.

As you move forward, I urge you to find ways to give — of your time, talents, or attention. It will make your life richer and the world better.

As I reflect on my new role, I return to those three simple lessons: Work hard. Do the right thing. Give back. I see these principles in action when I speak with Memorial students and alumni.

Over a century ago, Veblen described universities as “corporations for the cultivation and care of the community’s highest aspirations and ideals.” A hundred years later, Harvard President Lawrence Bacow echoed that sentiment, calling

higher education a “pillar of democracy,” one that — if weakened — would fundamentally diminish us.

I believe that deeply. In a time when many institutions are questioned, universities remain an infrastructure of hope – places where the search for understanding cultivates the critical skills our society needs most.

I hear this every day from Memorial students and alumni — how the lessons they learned on our campuses continue to guide them as they build businesses, lead communities and care for their families. These stories validate what researchers have long argued — that the value of university goes far beyond the financial.

Yes, the economic return is real; university graduates have better employment outcomes and higher earnings — often breaking generational cycles of poverty.

But that’s only part of the story.

Universities also deliver non-market, social benefits that ripple across families and communities. Graduates are more likely to vote, volunteer, and engage in public life. They’re more likely to avoid harmful behaviors, seek preventative healthcare, and lead healthier, more resilient lives. Of particular importance at this moment of global conflict and strife: they demonstrate greater tolerance and trust.

University changes people and those people – graduates like you -- change the world. Particularly in this moment of rapid change – from AI to shifting economies

to evolving social and cultural landscapes – we need your curiosity, compassion, and courage to help guide the way forward.

University changed me. Over 11 years and four degrees, what I gained most wasn't knowledge alone — it was a sense of voice, purpose, and engagement. University shaped who I am, not just what I do.

For many learners at Memorial, the road to this moment is far from easy – students work long hours, care for loved ones, commute daily, support family and take on debt to pursue their dreams – all in addition to the rigour of earning a degree.

These moments matter deeply. Today we celebrate your earned degree – and all that it represents – but we also honour the journey that make it possible: the late nights, the doubts, the discoveries, the juggling of priorities, the moments of persistence that quietly define who we become and the skills we need to navigate uncertainty in the future.

We need to get better at telling the stories of what happens between accepting an offer of admission to Memorial and the success of earning a degree. This is the in-between of struggle and perseverance, of finding voice and purpose and, frankly, the true value of a university education. Bluntly, the challenges we face today – social, economic, geopolitical, and human – demand precisely what universities cultivate: curiosity, courage, creativity, and connection.

Investing in universities is the right thing to do: For learners. For our province. For the future.

Like me, faculty and staff here at Memorial believe in the transformative power of earning a post-secondary credential. Through world-class teaching, innovative research, and deep community partnerships, we prepare students to thrive. As a collegium, we know that Universities matter and are fundamental to Canada's future as an economically secure, safe, sustainable, progressive, inclusive, and equitable democracy.

Supporting post-secondary learners, fueling their aspirations and celebrating their successes has been my passion for over 35 years. I am tremendously proud and excited to continue this work under the guise of my new appointment. It is a privilege to lead this university — especially now, as we confront profound global and local challenges.

Fueled by a shared sense of purpose, I make these four commitments that will guide my leadership over the next six years:

1. Learners First.

   I will prioritize student success and the student experience. My own journey began with struggle — but I found support, connection, and purpose. Every student deserves the same.
2. Collaborative Leadership.

   I will listen, consult, and celebrate the extraordinary faculty and staff who make this university great. Our workplace culture will reflect respect, creativity, and shared purpose.

3. Integrity and Trust.

   I will lead with transparency, uphold Memorial's values, and always honour our commitment to people and place.

4. Pride in Memorial.

   I will boldly and proudly champion this exceptional learning community, the remarkable people who call it home, and its special obligation to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Author Marianne Williamson wrote: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure… As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same."

Graduates - don't play small. The world needs your light. Shine it.

Show the world the power of post-secondary education. Work hard. Do the right thing. Give back. And be bold in celebrating Memorial's impact — on you, your community, and the world.

For 100 years, Memorial has been dedicated to "the cultivation and care of the community's highest aspirations and ideals."

Together, we will keep that flame burning — serving Newfoundland and Labrador, and far beyond.

Chancellor Ludlow and members of the Board: thank you for entrusting me with this tremendous responsibility. I will work tirelessly to serve this remarkable learning community — and this province we all call home.

This is our moment — a moment to renew faith in what universities make possible, to show that knowledge and community can change the world.

Let's rise to meet it – together.