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Academic Convocation for President Ford -- Father Hesburgh's Opening Remarks

Mr. President, Dr. Ford; Governor and Mrs. Bowen; Senators Hartke and Bayh; Congressman Brademas; distinguished colleagues from 30 universities and colleges in the states of Indiana and Ohio; Your Excellency; distinguished faculty and trustees of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's, and the greatest student body on earth -- happy St. Patrick's Day and all blessings. Mr. President, on behalf of all of these people, we welcome you to Notre Dame, and we welcome you as an honored member of this Notre Dame family.

My dear friends, this occasion is perhaps more historic than most of you think. Let me say why. In the year 1836, an Indian chief from the Potawatomi tribe, centered here at the place which is now called Notre Dame, traveled all the way to Detroit, Mich., and there he sought out a Father Badin who was visiting with a Père Richard who happened to be the cofounder of our guest's alma mater, the University of Michigan, and also the first Catholic priest to serve in the Congress of the United States from Michigan, as did for so many years our distinguished honoree this morning. He asked Father Badin if he would come to this spot a few hundred miles away and found a school for the Potawatomies. He came, he founded the school, and a few years later to our national disgrace the Potawatomi Indians were driven all the way to the Osage territory of Oklahoma, and the school died and the place remained empty. Father Badin bought most of this land at auction, several hundred acres, and he deeded it to whoever would come here and found a university. In 1842 Father Sorin arrived amid the bad weather of November on the Feast of St. Andrew, and with one little log cabin and a few hundred dollars in his pocket, he called this place Université de Notre Dame du Lac -- and that my friends is faith.

May I jump from that past to this future. For the past 10 years no President of the United States -- not President Johnson, not President Nixon -- set foot on a first-rate university campus. I would have to say to their credit that it wasn't entirely their fault. Universities are troublesome places because they are filled with people who think otherwise. But they are also places where people think day and night about the values that could characterize and give meaning to human life, about the values that could characterize and give honor and vision to our nation. This place is peopled by those who desire one thing -- the good life, the life of the mind, the life of the spirit and honor and valor. It's a sad thing when there is a gulf between the government of the country and academia, its universities and colleges. And I think it is to his eternal credit that our guest this morning -- our honoree, our President -- has thrown a bridge across that gulf, not only thrown a bridge across, but has walked across that bridge to us. We honor him for that act and for the healing of this rift between the universities and colleges and our government, between the religious groups in our country and our government, between so many people who felt alienated and have come to see that under this man and his healing power we can again be one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all.

The last time I spoke from this podium to many of you I told you that on behalf of hundreds of millions of Protestants and Jews and Catholics I had requested our President to add to the food going to the poor of the world two million tons. Shortly after that, our President in late January did allocate two million tons, and he not only made that decision so that food could move out immediately, but he also added two million tons to the budget for next year to take care of any future crisis.

One last point mentioned in the citation attracted a few hoots and hollers, which is understandable to me because I'm used to them by now and have scars to prove it. This point concerned an action he took shortly

after coming into office, something I believe his predecessor would never have done. What he did was open up a clemency program. People say it's not a very good program, and I say, "Compared to what?" There was a program after World War II called President Truman's clemency program. They looked at 15,000 people, and they granted less than 10 per cent clemency, 1,300. This program has already granted clemency to three times that number, and we have more than 12,000 waiting yet to be seen. Of those who have come before the program, more than 95 per cent have been granted clemency, and I say that's a good program.

I want to say for all of us, Mr. President, that we're delighted that you've graced this St. Patrick's Day by coming to our midst. I know you have something important to say to us, and I know that one does not introduce the President of the United States except to say, "the President of the United States."

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Mr. President, on behalf of all the people here present I want to thank you for that word of optimism in a sea of pessimism in which we all wallow today. I want to thank you for a vision, because without a vision the people perish, and you above all must give our nation that vision, as you gave it today. I thank you for coming to this place to renew America's commitment of optimistic interest and help for the poorer people of this world. I thank you for saying that peace is the work of justice, and that we will be committed to justice.

While I cannot speak for all the universities and colleges in America, I think I can say from what I know of them that they are behind your vision, that they will follow you to the end of the earth to bring peace with justice. They will work with you with all the intellectual and moral fibre

they have, with all their scholarship on the faculty side, with all their idealistic enthusiasm on the student side so that together we who represent 9 million people are committed to a better America. The vision which you have given us this morning is one that we are behind solidly, wholeheartedly and generously, and we thank you for giving it to us.

Now we will have the "Alma Mater," and those of you who do not remember the words, they are on the back of the program. Also at this moment I have the necessity of thanking so many people who worked so hard, especially Jim Murphy and Jim Gibbons, and all the Notre Dame people and the people from the White House who literally have been up around the clock for two days preparing for this. I also thank this audience, because when I was asked by the President's assistants if the President would be welcome at Notre Dame, I said, "We welcome people like nobody in this whole world."

When the "Alma Mater" is completed, I ask you to remain in place until the platform party leaves. I must thank also Mayor Miller and Mayor Prickett for the wonderful welcome they provided for the President between the airport and here. It was really heartwarming to see what it means to be President of all the people. We only have one President, Sir, and we cherish you.

And, finally, for our country, our state, our city, our university, for our President, our governor, our mayors, for all of our faculty and students, and for all of us may I conclude my part of this with an Irish prayer, an ancient prayer that begins with now and ends in eternity: "May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be at your back. May the good Lord hold you in the palm of His hand, and at the end may you be in heaven 15 minutes before the devil even knows you are dead."

God bless you all.