

DOING WELL IN WORK AND DOING GOOD

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Omaha Bar Association Memorial Day Program
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Judges of the state and federal bench, families and friends of those who are honored today, fellow lawyers, and honored guests: We pause today to honor those in our profession whose journey has ended.

Our gathering also gives us the opportunity to recognize that the stewardship of the cause of justice is the responsibility of those of us who remain.

Our first task is to honor those whose absence we must acknowledge.

Their careers touched the lives of many in a multitude of ways.

Many worked in private practice. Some worked in businesses, large and small; some labored for the public good directly by working in government or in public service; and one fulfilled his calling by donning the robe and assuming the responsibilities of judicial office.

They had rich lives beyond their work. Most were spouses and parents and siblings. They were friends and neighbors. They gave their time to political endeavors, to their churches and synagogues. They found ways to contribute their skills to important causes which intersected their lives.

They were advocates, they spoke for others, they were writers of briefs, they were good listeners and they were keen observers.

They spent their professional lives adding to their knowledge, honing their skills and questioning the accepted wisdom of the day.

Too many of them were taken from us far too early – at ages when they should have had much more to give.

In many ways – this group of honorees is representative of our legal community as a whole.

Today, to all their families and friends gathered here, who shared them with us, we express our gratitude for their contributions, and we acknowledge their achievements.

Theirs were privileged lives—for surely responding to a calling—a calling to serve the greater good, to serve in the pursuit of commonly held values upon which our notions of justice are based—is a high privilege.

They spent their days trying to do well in their work—and more importantly—doing good with their lives.

Today, we mourn their passing.

We speak their names and recall the days we worked with them in common cause. Their absence is a palpable and poignant reminder that they have left to us the stewardship of justice in our society, of justice for all.

We acknowledge that these we mourn have joined many before them who have died—who worked in our profession, who lived out their lives in the service of justice. We stand on the shoulders of all those who have labored before us.

We acknowledge the mantle which they have laid down and which we now hold in our hands. The task entrusted to us, is no less than the administration of a legal system, the goals of which are to provide just outcomes in a fair process and to husband the fruits of an effective justice system: Equal opportunity in a diverse world; an efficient market place; a society in which no one is above the law; and,

We acknowledge the truth of Pope Paul VI's insight that, if we want to have peace in our world—we must work for justice.

We recognize that we, too, are privileged to respond to a calling—a calling which results in serving others in the pursuit of fairness and justice for all.

Surely, if we gathered only to commend those with whom we have lived and served, that, in itself would be a good and worthwhile endeavor.

But, in so doing, we would miss the opportunity to affirm their lives in a far more meaningful way.

Fulfilling our calling to the Bar is not accomplished with mere words. Rather, we affirm our calling by our actions.

Achieving a just society, requires a tenacious commitment to the highest principles and values which must be lived each day.

Perfection was not required of those we honor today and it is not required of us.

What is required is effort, diligence, honesty, adherence to the enduring values of our profession.

As we return to our offices, to our chambers, to our families and our communities, we recognize that what we do affects many. Only by living out the highest principles embodied in the rich traditions of our profession each day, will we reclaim the proud place that the legal profession once held. In every undertaking, in every case, our work must be informed by our understanding of the important role law plays in our society as a check against unbridled self-interest and the tyranny of the weak by the strong. This is the charge left to us.

The roses which signify those who are absent today, remind us of truths none of us can escape. The first is the miracle of today. Each day we are given is an invaluable gift, maybe the most precious asset anyone has ever possessed: today. And, what we achieve must be achieved day by day. Second, we are reminded that there is a limit to the number of days any of us have. One day, a rose will signify our absence from this gathering.

These we honor today, are representative of our legal community as a whole, which I have found to be filled with overwhelmingly good and decent people who live and work with a keen sense of a calling in their lives, who are involved in important ways in their community and who serve with open hearts and willing hands.

Our commitment to each other, to those we serve, to our community, and particularly to you who loved and shared with us those we honor here today – is that – we will honor their lives and contributions – by striving to do well in our work and by doing good with our lives.