

ADMISSIONS CEREMONY, 1 JUNE 2015

SESSION ONE

On behalf of the judges of the Supreme Court, congratulations on your admission as legal practitioners. You can be rightly proud of your intellectual achievement and of your determination and resilience in completing the demanding requirements for admission. And a warm welcome to your family and friends who have supported you one way or another, in your success so far. They have earned a share of your reflected glory on this significant day in your lives, especially in the case of Miss McDuff, Ms Jahnke and Mr Twinn whose admissions were moved by family members.

The legal profession has undergone many changes since Justice Mullins, Justice Burns and I were admitted as practitioners last century in the now-demolished court building. But we are not so old that we do not remember the expectations we had as newly admitted legal practitioners. Like you, we hoped it would mean more money after many years of student poverty. There is nothing wrong with that. Queensland needs clever, aspirational, entrepreneurial, hardworking young lawyers to assist in responsible, sustainable economic growth locally, nationally and globally.

Commercial considerations must, however, always remain secondary to the professional and ethical obligations of lawyers. As legal practitioners, you are officers of the court. That means you must place your duty to the court before your own interests or those of your clients. In particular, you must never mislead the court.

Congratulations on joining the independent legal profession which plays an institutional role in our democracy, operating as a check on the abuse of executive power. The legal profession ensures that every citizen has access to the rule of law in independent courts. Lawyers are duty bound to protect and pursue their clients' rights, unswayed by the power, privilege or wealth of others, whether individuals, corporations or the State.

This means you may be required to undertake advocacy for the most despised, marginalised and unpopular members of society in the face of disapproval from the legislature, the executive, the media and the public. As lawyers you may also be called on to defend the independence of the third arm of government, the judiciary. You have witnessed that in very recent times, when both the Queensland Law Society and the Bar Association of Queensland defended the courts from uninformed claims that they are dysfunctional. I thank the professional associations for their support and take this opportunity to assure the people of Queensland that the judges of the Trial Division and of the Court of Appeal have never faltered in their core work: delivering timely justice to litigants according to their judicial oaths and affirmations of office.

Despite the important community role of lawyers and their financial success, it seems that lawyers are all too often dissatisfied with their professional lives. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the US Supreme Court, wrote in her book "The Majesty of the Law" that there is no greater duty or pleasure for a lawyer than to ensure there is indeed equal justice under the law for the poor, the disadvantaged and the disenfranchised. Many Queensland lawyers recognise this by donating scores of

hours of pro bono service. In providing access to the law for impoverished clients or for community groups, lawyers not only help those clients. Lawyers doing pro bono work also raise community confidence in the profession and in its important institutional role. And they bring additional meaning and joy to their own professional lives. I recommend it to you. So does the National Pro Bono Resource Centre which encourages every lawyer to donate 35 pro bono hours each year.

May you achieve your dreams, including your financial goals, during your legal career. But do so by upholding your professional, ethical obligations; by fulfilling your institutional democratic role if called upon; by demonstrating compassion; and by sharing your skills with your fellow human beings. That way, when you are old men and women, retired from the law, you can reflect upon your working lives with satisfaction, knowing you gave your clients, the courts and the community your professional best.

Our good wishes go with you on your journey.