



McGill

Faculty of Law | Faculté de droit

## McGill Law Convocation Address

Dean Robert Leckey

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You did it! Whatever path brought you to today, your graduation is a glorious moment for the DCL, LLM, and BCL/JD Classes of 2022. Your accomplishment in being here is likely greater than in normal times. Your professors and our admin staff celebrate this milestone with you.

As for you, today is an intense day for us. Many of your professors today donned an academic gown for the first time in three years. Your profs feel a heady brew of emotions as we see our former students and research assistants cross the stage, in sneakers, vertiginously high heels, and everything in between. We rejoice in your achievements and are grateful for what you have taught us. We may feel a bit sad, because while the McGill Law community maintains ties around the planet, we will miss seeing you in Chancellor Day Hall.

Puisque votre groupe est plus branché que jamais, vous resterez en contact l'un l'autre par Facebook, LinkedIn ou autrement. Plusieurs d'entre vous resteront en contact avec moi sur Twitter ou LinkedIn. À titre de diplômé, vous parviendrez – plus ou moins facilement – à me tutoyer.

Et maintenant, un mot pour votre entourage. Merci d'avoir appuyé et encouragé un être cher pendant ses études. Plusieurs parents n'auraient jamais prévu héberger une personne inscrite à la Zoom School of Law, de longs mois durant...

Par ailleurs, la promotion de 2022 a profité de la générosité des cohortes précédentes – y compris, dans certains cas, afin de mieux vous équiper pour votre apprentissage virtuel. J'espère que vous saurez faire preuve de la même générosité lorsque vous serez en mesure de le faire, que ce soit comme bénévole ou donateur.

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Dans notre grande faculté, vous avez étudié et vécu le droit d'une manière unique. Vous nous quittez habilités à penser le droit différemment que les diplômés d'ailleurs – votre imagination ayant été stimulée par la sagesse de plus d'une tradition juridique.

Vous avez été formés pour vous attaquer aux problèmes avec créativité. Vous êtes en mesure de gérer des situations qui traversent de nombreuses frontières et qui impliquent des règles provenant de nombreuses sources. La pandémie en est une; la crise climatique en est une autre.

Vous avez, donc, plusieurs cordes à votre arc qui vous permettront de briller dans des conditions incertaines et fluctuantes.

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During your time as law students, whether high on Peel Street or remotely, your passions and talents amazed and inspired my colleagues and me. You ran student-initiated seminars. You mooted, managed scholarly journals, *Contours*, and the *Quid*. You offered legal information and worked for NGOs, here and overseas; for law firms; governments; and judges, virtually or in person. The LSA and GLSA helped us in sustaining student life during the remote periods and on return to campus. As TAs and GLs, many of you accompanied first-year students in difficult pandemic circumstances. Many of you played Ping-Pong and foosball, broke in the piano new to the Atrium, and made valiant efforts to assure the financial viability of Thomson House.

You engaged in activism and fostered community through the Indigenous Law Association/Droit autochtone, Muslim Law Students' Association, Black Law Students' Association of McGill, Jewish Law Students' Association, Law Needs Feminism Because, Outlaw, Women of Colour Collective, McGill Business Law Association, DALA, and RadLaw. You worked for the wrongfully convicted, engaged with students in local high schools through our LEX program, and pedalled in the Christie Bike Ride.

Many of you blogged, tweeted, and published op-eds. You occasionally tested the boundaries of civility on Facebook.

Many of you handled paid work and caregiving, including dealing with serious illness or loss.

I salute your energy, tenacity, adaptability, and courage. And here I'll add a word of thanks to my professorial and administrative colleagues for their extraordinary efforts to adapt our program and serve our students during the pandemic, all the while experiencing

COVID's disruption in their lives. And I affirm our promise that we will do everything in our power to ensure that the cohorts following yours will have the full benefit of a vibrant, in-person law-school experience on our campus.

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Tout comme vous, notre faculté évolue constamment. Le choix des cours intensifs des Focus Week est le reflet de vos préférences et de vos critiques. Votre formation a intégré mieux que jamais les traditions juridiques autochtones. Durant vos études, nous avons accueilli nos trois premiers professeurs autochtones. Nous avons récemment embauché deux collègues qui se spécialisent en *Critical Race Theory*.

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Your time as a law student has been marked by reminders of our world's need for more justice: the adoption of Bill 21 and legal challenges to it (led overwhelmingly by graduates of this faculty); marches for the climate; protests against anti-Black racism; the discovery of children's unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools; and violent acts, including those of anti-Asian racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. Many of you have protested and participated in efforts related to these and other causes.

With your legal education, including sensitivity to social context, you are well placed to speak out in places of power. Honour the voices and spirits of those who, for whatever reason, are silenced.

You will change jobs more often than previous generations. If you have a job already, congratulations! It's your next job, not your last. And if you haven't got one, don't be discouraged. Many of our alumni found rich opportunities outside standard recruitment.

While some say there are too many lawyers, our world faces many challenges towards which engaged citizens with legal training – yourselves – have much to offer. To be sure, Afghanistan and Ukraine remind us that terrible things happen despite lawyers' best efforts.

But for many of our thorniest challenges, there is work for institution builders, for regulators, and for resolvers of disputes. Whatever the challenges abroad, we are reminded that here, too, democracy, the separation of powers, the protection of minorities, and the rule of law are fragile. You have a role in defending our core institutions – we are counting on you.

Our profession is rapidly changing. The pandemic gave the Bar and the courts an electroshock that should foster access to justice. Ask what these changes mean and adjust your path to them. The offer of legal services doesn't yet align with needs. For your generation, lifelong learning will be a constant.

I acknowledge that our profession is beset by difficulties, including stress, family breakdown, and substance abuse. Our profession's leaders have broken the silence surrounding problems with mental health and I know your generation will not be silent.

Take time to care for yourselves, your loved ones, and one another. You won't be able to care for the world unless you do.

Much about your future is unknown. Still, by now you probably know your core values. You have an evolving conception of justice. You know which activities give you the sense of being in your sweet spot. Stay true to all that. Re-evaluate from time to time and don't be afraid to alter your course. Outside school, with no graduation date, deciding when to jump will be up to you.

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My colleagues and I wish you great success, however you define and measure it. When you fail, as you will – as we all do – apologize when appropriate, and don't stay down for long. When you pick yourself up, may you draw the lessons waiting for you – and may your bruises heal swiftly.

Bravo à chacun et à chacune. Donnez-nous de vos nouvelles, et revenez nous voir souvent, puisque vous nous manquez déjà.

Nous sommes tellement fiers de vous.