

Good Afternoon! My daughter, Mary-Logan, and I are humbled to be with you today. At this momentous time in the history of our nation, the Catholic Church, and the University of Notre Dame, our children need to see people willing to speak up for life. So do Father Jenkins and the Notre Dame Board of Trustees.

I am here today because of two choices. The first is the “choice” that I made 10 years ago, when I was pregnant and graduating from Notre Dame. The second is the “choice” that Father Jenkins made for this year’s honoree.

No one in this world is perfect. I am certainly not. But over the last 10 years, I have learned one important lesson in life: And the lesson is this: There are things worth fighting for! And ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you: one of them is standing right next to me ...

We talk abstractly about “life.” It is not abstract to me. My daughter is here with us today, in the flesh. She is here because I did not cave into the rhetoric and pressures around me when I found myself facing an unplanned pregnancy three months before my own graduation from Notre Dame.

I know what it’s like to be an unwed pregnant college student. I know the fears and anxiety of an unplanned pregnancy. I also know the pressures to choose “other options.” Most of all, I know that I am not the only woman to find herself in that position.

All across this country, college students, including Notre Dame students, have faced and continue to face unplanned pregnancies. Sadly, pregnant women in college have a high probability of choosing abortion over life. These women cite the fear that they will not be able to complete their educations or start their careers as the primary reason for choosing abortion. If we care about life, we need to change that!

I chose life because I was blessed by the examples of my parents and my grandfather. My father showed me how a man lives his Catholic faith. My mother marched for life. And my grandfather -- an obstetrician -- took his Hippocratic oath very seriously. It says: “Above all; do no harm.” In other words, I did not learn to hold LIFE sacred from “dining-room talk.” I learned from the example of good and loving people around me. From the time I was young, I was taught to turn to “Mary, Our Mother” in times of need.

Ten years ago, I sought Our Lady’s help when I found myself pregnant. I had the natural fears and worries of any young college student in that position. But I also had a great trust. Right here, at Our Lady’s Grotto, I fell to my knees in my hour of need and asked Mary for strength and courage. She

did not disappoint! On All Saints Day in 1999, I was blessed with the gift of a beautiful baby girl. When the doctor placed her in my arms, I knew there was only one name possible for her: Mary.

This morning, ten years since my own graduation, I returned to the Grotto to give thanks. This time I was with my nine-year-old daughter. And together we thanked Our Lady for teaching us to be open to God's will ... to never be afraid of God's will ... and to recognize that there may be sacrifices and suffering – but God's will also brings great peace and joy.

My friends, as an imperfect Catholic, a daughter of Notre Dame, and the mother of Mary-Logan, I am proud to stand with her today and say to you: This precious child standing next to me is our witness to life!

So ... this is very personal for me. When I learned of Father Jenkins' decision to honor President Obama, a pro-choice advocate, at this year's graduation, I started thinking about the message this sends. What is the message to those watching from afar? What is the message to my daughter? And what is the message to the pregnant Notre Dame student in a predicament like mine?

In the article I wrote, I posed a question that I believe is at the heart of this graduation: I asked Father Jenkins this: Who draws support from your decision to honor President Obama? Is it the pregnant Notre Dame woman - who may be sitting in this year's graduating class – who wants desperately to keep her baby? Or those who, like my boyfriend at the time, tell her that the Catholic teaching on the intrinsic evil of abortion is just “dining-room talk”?

I am still waiting for a response but I think we all know what the answer is ... At best, Notre Dame's decision to honor the most pro-choice President in our history sends a message of indifference about the sanctity of unborn life. After all, if abortion does not appear to be an important issue to a great Catholic institution such as Notre Dame, many Catholics will conclude that it does not have to be a big deal for them either.

Well, my daughter and I have a different message!

OUR MESSAGE is that women deserve better than abortion.

OUR MESSAGE is that people should care enough about women to do everything in their power to spare them the heartbreak and grave regret that so often follow abortion.

OUR MESSAGE is that the joys and rewards of bringing new life into the world – whether for you or for some loving adoptive family – far outweigh the sacrifices.

OUR MESSAGE is that Notre Dame should be on the frontlines in the fight to uphold the dignity of unborn life.

OUR MESSAGE is that the protection of the unborn is THE defining social justice issue of our day. For what is “so-called” social justice if it does not include protection for the innocent and defenseless unborn?

OUR MESSAGE is LIFE.

All of us have a roll to play. Some of you volunteer for life-affirming pregnancy resource centers like the “Women’s Care Center” here in South Bend. Others will find your own place. For me, it is my work with “Room at the Inn” in Charlotte, North Carolina.

I am proud to tell you that “Room at the Inn” is now in the midst of a fundraising campaign aimed for something truly revolutionary on our nation’s campuses: America’s first college-based maternity and aftercare residence. This new facility, adjacent to Belmont Abbey College, will enable college students from the Carolinas and beyond to choose life for their babies and complete their own educations.

Wouldn’t it be a tremendous witness for life if Notre Dame would build a facility just like this, under Our Lady’s shadow, to serve as a refuge for any college student in this area facing an unplanned pregnancy?

Let us not be like the citizens of Bethlehem who missed an opportunity to offer the young, expecting Mary, the mother of Our Lord, and her husband Joseph a “room at the inn” in their hour of need!

In closing, I would like to leave you with words from the book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 30. God says to His people: “This day, I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore LIFE!”

I have learned that if you do, you will not always find the road easy. But you will know a joy that makes the angels sing!

May God bless you ... May God bless the Class of 2009 ... and may God bless Notre Dame, a university dedicated in name to the woman whom God chose to carry His Only Son, Our Savior, in her womb!

Praise God who came to us as Jesus in the womb!