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## McAleese will speak to grads

### Ireland's president to also receive honorary degree at commencement

#### [Mary Kate Malone](#)

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The President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, will be the principal graduation speaker and an honorary degree recipient at Notre Dame's commencement ceremony Sunday.

"As an attorney, journalist, scholar and now president, Mary McAleese is an inspiring model for women, a fierce champion for peace and a passionate voice within the Catholic Church," University President Father John Jenkins said in a statement. "The theme of her presidency is 'building bridges,' and she has done just that while staying true to herself."

The choice of McAleese as commencement speaker was finalized "a ways back," Senior Executive Assistant to the President Father Jim McDonald said Feb. 7 from Dublin, but she needed permission from Ireland's Parliament before arrangements could be finalized.

McDonald, Jenkins and other University officers were scheduled to dine with McAleese Feb. 7 in Dublin.

"She's a wonderful woman, accomplished lawyer and politician," McDonald said. "She'll be an excellent speaker."

McAleese is Ireland's eighth president and the first from Northern Ireland. She was elected

to the Irish presidency in 1997 and ran unopposed for a second term in 2004. McAleese has been welcomed by both Protestants and Catholics during her frequent visits to Northern Ireland, despite predictions that her presidency would cause further division.

Born into a Catholic family in Belfast, Northern Ireland - a predominately Catholic city - McAleese has been an advocate for the Catholic Church, serving as a member of the Catholic Church Episcopal Delegation to the New Ireland Forum in 1984 and as a Church delegate to the North Commission on Contentious Parades in 1996. She was also a delegate to the 1995 White House conference on trade and investment in Ireland.

She studied law at Queen's University in Belfast and graduated with honors in 1973. McAleese was a professor at Trinity College and later worked as a reporter for the national television network of Ireland, RTÉ, for two years.

In 1981, McAleese returned to Trinity and six years later moved back to Northern Ireland to become the director of the Institute of Professional Legal Studies at Queen's University. She was appointed Pro-Vice Chancellor there.

Her husband, Dr. Martin McAleese, received an honorary degree from Notre Dame in 2004.

McAleese is not the first foreign head of state to speak at a University commencement. An Irish prime minister, two Canadian prime ministers and a president of El Salvador have all served as the commencement speaker during the past 50 years.

Last year's commencement speaker was Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation.

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