

Welcome! Welcome to our students who have earned masters degrees in Hebrew Literature and in Sacred Music. Welcome to our student (hi Joyce) receiving her doctor of ministry degree. Welcome to our faculty, administration, students, leaders of our board of Advisors and Board of Governors. Welcome to Ambassador Tom Nides and Rabbi Rick Jacobs. Welcome to family and friends of today's degree recipients and to all those joining on livestream. And welcome especially to my classmates, our alumni celebrating 25 years since ordination.

It is such a joy for me personally to serve not only in my official capacity in this ceremony but to also receive this honorary degree. (and I am going to bring this back to today's graduates, I promise). How to best celebrate this moment with my classmates at today's ceremony? I considered staging a reprise of what was no doubt the highlight of our school experience, our 4th year Purim spiel (I was Borowitz. I'm just saying). Or I thought we could create a list of everything we did not know when we were ordained 25 years ago. But we don't have that kind of time.

So instead, President Rehfeld, on behalf of the College-Institute, will bestow upon us honorary Doctor of Music and Doctor of Divinity degrees in acknowledgment and thanks for our service to our people and the world. And let us stop for a moment and think about what that service is. 25 years times the number of all of us assembled here and those honored similarly in LA and Cincinnati amounts to a lot of cantorial and rabbinical labor, service, and love. Could we even count the number of life cycle events officiated, prayers offered, and words of Torah shared. The number of communities led. The moments of invitation to awareness of God's presence in this world. Each of us on a path we could never have predicted for ourselves, with lessons learned the hard way and here and there moments of transcendence that sustain us. For which we gather today in gratitude to God for the honor

of such service, and gratitude to our mentors and teachers at HUC-JIR and everywhere else who gave us the gift of this opportunity.

It is this same gift our masters recipients today look forward to as they imagine translating the Torah they've learned, symbolized by the degrees they receive today, into a life of applied Jewish wisdom. The call to apply this wisdom may be familiar to many of you in Pirke Avot:

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין תּוֹרָה, אֵין דְּרָף אֶרֶץ. אִם אֵין דְּרָף אֶרֶץ, אֵין תּוֹרָה.
אִם אֵין חֻכְמָה, אֵין יִרְאָה. אִם אֵין יִרְאָה, אֵין חֻכְמָה. אִם אֵין חֻכְמָה, אֵין דַּעַת. אִם אֵין דַּעַת, אֵין בִּינָה. אִם אֵין בִּינָה, אֵין קַמַח. אִם אֵין קַמַח, אֵין תּוֹרָה.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said: If there is no Torah [study] there is no proper conduct; if there is no proper conduct there is no Torah [study]. If there is no wisdom there is no fear of God; if there is no fear of God there is no wisdom. If there is no knowledge there is no understanding; if there is no understanding there is no knowledge. If there is no flour (sustenance) there is no Torah; if there is no Torah there is no flour. (Mishnah, Pirke Avot 3:17)

Our 25 year alumni know and our students know too: the teaching and learning we do at HUC-JIR in our seminary programs is toward clergy formation, the transformation into leaders who apply Jewish wisdom that cultivates awareness of the Divine and builds a more just and sustainable world. That is the mission that buoys us even in times as challenging as our own. None of us knows the exact right path through today's turbulence and distress. So instead, we rely on the daily return to Torah we have learned, to God whom we sense, to the community we hold so dear, and to this world that we love.

My dear classmates, mazal tov on this remarkable milestone. Dear students, congratulations on the achievement of your degrees. We

can't wait to see the impact you will make on this world in the next 26 years—and beyond.