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# John Kerry urges BC graduates to spread dignity

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 19, 2014

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BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

**“When families have access to clean water and clean power, they can live in dignity,” John Kerry told more than 4,000 undergraduate and graduate students.**

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Invoking his Catholic faith, his Boston College law degree, and his service in Vietnam, Secretary of State John F. Kerry urged BC’s class of 2014 Monday to tackle some of mankind’s greatest problems — including climate change, disease, and extremism — while instilling dignity around the globe.

“When families have access to clean water and clean power, they can live in dignity,” he told more than 4,000 undergraduate and graduate students gathered under sunny skies in Alumni Stadium. “When people have the freedom to choose their government on election day and to engage their fellow citizens every day, they can live in dignity.

“When all citizens can make their full contribution, no matter their ethnicity, no matter who they love or what name they give to God, they can live in dignity,” said Kerry,

the former Massachusetts senator and 2004 Democratic presidential candidate who earned a law degree from BC in 1976.

Wearing black robes and caps, dozens of graduates stood and waved their white commencement booklets to identify themselves to friends and family seated in the surrounding bleachers, packed by an estimated 15,000 people.

Clutching cellphones, many graduates posed with friends for photos, fired off texts, and updated Facebook, Twitter, and other online profiles.

Even Kerry, before the ceremony, tweeted a black-and-white photo of his younger self at a graduation.

“Deja vu to ’76 [@BCLaw](#),” he wrote, one day after giving the commencement keynote address at his undergraduate alma mater Yale University, [where he spoke about maintaining hope in government](#).

At BC, Kerry started his speech with a series of jokes.

He said his two alma maters, BC and Yale, have much in common, namely, their “mutual dislike of Harvard.”

And he spoke about how his job involves monitoring many of the world’s rivalries. “BC versus Notre Dame is at the top of my list,” he said. “And then there’s the Red Sox and Yankees.”

Kerry recalled that when he attended law school, BC became like home for him and he was warmly welcomed by one man in particular, the Rev. Robert Drinan, the longtime BC Law dean who became the first Roman Catholic priest elected to Congress.

“He made no apologies for his deep and abiding Catholic commitment to the weak, the helpless, the downtrodden,” Kerry said.

“ ‘If a person is really a Christian,’ Father Drinan would say, ‘they will be in anguish over global hunger, injustice, over the denial of educational opportunity.’ ”

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Kerry spent several minutes urging the graduates to confront climate change.

“As we sit here on an absolutely beautiful morning in Boston, you might not see climate change as an immediate threat to your job, your community, or your families,” he said. “But let me tell you, it is. “Climate change is directly related to the potential of greater conflict and greater stability — instability,” Kerry added. “It is the poorest and the weakest who face the greatest risk. As Father Drinan would say, we should be in anguish over this.”

He recounted how Thomas Jefferson, the nation’s first secretary of state, spoke about the image of using one candle to light another.

“Both candles gain light and neither candle loses any,” Kerry said.

“So graduates of 2014, pass on your light to others,” he said, And, quoting the writings of St. Ignatius Loyola, he added: “Set the world aflame with your service.”

At its 138th commencement, the university awarded honorary degrees to Kerry; to Boston Celtics legend and former BC coach Bob Cousy; and to three alumni: Ann Riley Finck, a leader in the nursing field; Paloma Izquierdo-Hernandez, president and chief executive of Urban Health Plan Inc.; and Robert J. Morrissey, founder and senior partner of the Boston law firm Morrissey, Hawkins & Lynch and a BC trustee.

Anna Adondakis, 22, of St. Lake City earned a degree in biology and plans to study further to become a clinical pharmacologist.

After the ceremony, she posed for photos with a dozen of her classmates who became her closest companions over the past four years.

Her proud mother, Tara, looked on.

“These girls right here — lifelong friendship,” she said. “They’re all so close and just really good people.”

Anna called graduation day “bittersweet.” She said she will miss her friends, but vowed she would not lose touch.

“You’ll always have a home at the Heights,” she said.

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