

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Pauline Ryan and I'm Bree Baccaglini.

Pauline: We are this year's co-presidents of the Stanford Law Association, the law school student government. We are so honored to help usher in another year here at Stanford Law School alongside a few of our peers—past and present— the Office of Religious Life, and Dean Martinez. We are excited to be a part of Convocation, a new milestone that we hope will become a tradition in the years to come. We don't often have the opportunity to gather as a community, which is why today serves as *a unique and valuable invitation to set intentions for the coming year together*. It gives us space to consider what we hope to accomplish in "our one wild and precious life" (to borrow the words of poet Mary Oliver), and to consider how SLS can further each of our personal and professional journeys. Though we are all at different points in these journeys—some of us just mere weeks in, and others, including the distinguished faculty sitting behind us, many decades in---- we are all hopefully navigating towards the **same north star: using the power and privilege of our law degrees to improve our world.**

Bree: At the start of this new year, the question that most preoccupies me and Pauline is how we can build a community during our time at SLS that nourishes and sustains all of us on our different journeys. Unfortunately, discussing community can be maddeningly vague, as it tends to careen towards the platitudinous. But figuring out what constitutes a strong community—and why we would even want one—seems important, so bear with us.

Bree: Most simply, I believe that in each one of us, there's a deep hunger for meaningful human connection. A hunger to be seen, to be understood, to be respected, to be loved. When a group of people commit to fostering such values, enact them faithfully, and are willing to subordinate some interests for the betterment of the collective, they transform into a community. A family. Sounds

easy enough. But this is actually very difficult. I would argue that most large groups of people are actually just large groups of people—they are not really communities in the *true* sense of the term. Why is that? Many aspects of our modern life—most especially a persistent time deficit and an increasingly virtual existence—are not conducive to building strong communities. They are, in fact, *antithetical* to fostering genuine human connection. We are drawn into our phones, and away from the people in front of us. We are attracted to anonymized online debate, instead of in-person discussion with peers. We dole out our time according to professional ROI, and not always personal satisfaction. Yet, if we were writing a recipe for community, the rising agents—the most important ingredients—would be time and in-person communication, and the rest of the batter would be layered with kindness, curiosity, selflessness, and gratitude. Though many of us effortlessly exhibit these latter qualities, we are all desperate for more minutes in the hour, and more hours in the day.

Pauline: Given how limited a resource time is for us, it makes sense that we are reluctant to divert any energy from “productive activities” like reading, briefing, studying, emailing. But, as a 3L, I can now say with certainty that taking time off from these “productive activities” is essential to surviving law school. *(pause)* Yes we’re law students, but we’re also people who desire to create a rich community with the friends, colleagues, and mentors around us. If we put this kind of living on pause until the hard work is over, it will never begin, because life is relentless in plying us with The Next Big Thing to race towards—2L year, 3L year, a clerkship, a job, an interview, a promotion, a nomination, an election. But life cannot be forever lived in anticipation. It must be lived now.

Bree: So, this year, let’s all commit a little bit more time to those around us – to learn from them, to show them kindnesses. As a friend recently told me, what we do with our scarcest resource—for many of us, time—reveals the most about our

values. But luckily, with even just a little bit of time, we all have the ability to lift one another up, as so many of you have shown: you have complimented a classmate on their cold call after class, you have helped them understand a concept, even if—yes, technically—this hurts your chances on the curve, you have organized potlucks and outings just to bring your section joy, you have shared your outlines, you have showed up spontaneously on doorsteps with cookies. You have been kind because it's the right thing to do. But it's also the smart thing to do. As Dean Martinez shared with many of us as 1Ls: it's a small world after all, and we will run into each other for years to come. (Pauline and I should know: we actually went to high school together, and are still stuck with one another all these years later!).

Pauline: If we invest the time to learn deeply about one another, converse about difficult things with civility and respect, and commit—even in the hardest moments—to being kind to this community and to ourselves, we will be amazed by how much stronger our SLS community will grow. In sum, let us challenge one another to have our successes and joys on our various paths this year be *because* of one another, and not *in spite* of one another. Thank you.