

Remarks on behalf of new lawyers



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Jacob Damstra offered to share his remarks from the 190th Annual Fall Opening of the Courts in London, Ontario on Sep 28, 2016.

Your Honours, Your Worships, Dean Scott, servicemen and women, new colleagues of the Bar, friends, families and members of the community and the church, good evening. And to the Salvation Army, thank you for hosting our 190th Annual Fall Opening of the Courts in London and for providing this magnificent space and marvelous band.

My name is Jacob Damstra and I have been asked to give remarks on behalf of the newest members of this great profession of law in London and Middlesex. While I am honoured and humbled to speak for myself and my peers of the 2016 Call to the Bar, at this stage in my two week old career as a lawyer, I am not sure I have much to say—don't worry, my experience with lawyers assures me this loss for words won't last long. In any case, I thought I might make brief comments on what the practice of law—and indeed, the entire justice system—mean to me as a new lawyer. And I say the entire justice system, because I see my role as a lawyer practising law as but a very small piece of what is necessary to preserve, promote, and protect the rule of law.

I first want to acknowledge and thank the men and women on

the front lines of justice. The officers patrolling our streets, the constables securing our courts and transporting offenders, at the local, provincial and national levels, all deserve the deepest respect and gratitude for putting themselves in harm's way to make our society a safer, more peaceful, more just one in which to live. I am blessed to be marrying into an Ontario Provincial Police family, and I myself serve as an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces; thus I am palpably aware of the threats we face and the importance of peace and order on both domestic and international levels. So to those of you in uniform here today and to all of the others with whom you serve: thank you, I—we lawyers—salute you.

From the front lines, to behind the bench, I want to address another institution with which I feel close—the judiciary. We all know, at some level, how fortunate we are to live in a society where the independence and impartiality of the judiciary is guarded so vigilantly. As a result, we can trust that disputes will be resolved fairly and justly, and peace and order in our communities will be preserved. As a Law Clerk to the Justices of the Court of Appeal, I had a first-hand, behind the scenes, view of this. I must apologize to my new colleagues at the Bar, I don't have any secret formulas about how to win an appeal, perhaps to the dismay of my new employer. But what I can tell you is how much the judges with whom I worked care about reaching not only the right result, but the result that is fair and just too (even though, as lawyers, we know *our* clients is always right). And I did learn, having asked many judges who have lived their entire lives in law: “what is the greatest lesson you have ever learned?”—certain themes are repeated. I don't think I'm breaching any Judge-Clerk confidentiality to share two of these lessons today. The first is *be honest*—with yourself and with others, because in the end the truth will prevail, it always does; life, and the practice of law, are far more

fulfilling when lived virtuously. The second is *be humble*—never overestimate your own ability, knowledge, or importance and always keep learning.

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of events such as this one. Some, especially of my vintage, might view such ceremonial events as outdated and unnecessary. But I would encourage my generation of lawyers to continue to attend and support this tradition and others. The Opening of the Courts provides an opportunity for the Bench, the Bar, the Police, faith groups, and the community to come together; to remember we are each only one part of the justice system; to acknowledge we have much to share with and learn from each other.

I will close with a passage I have written and refined over the past few years, as I contemplated my impending entry into the profession of law. I think this captures my philosophy about life as much as it describes how I see my role in this justice system of which we are all a part:

Without peace, the seeds of justice will not take root;

Without justice, the flowers of peace will never blossom;

Without love, which gives people the integrity and the courage to do the right things and fight for them both, the world will enjoy neither.

So, officers, justices, and colleagues of the legal profession, as I set out on my legal career, I intend to do so with integrity, courage, and love, to fight for peace and justice. I will attempt to practise with honesty and humility; I will strive to attend and support this tradition and others, to learn from each of you, and to share what I learn along the way. I hope that you will join me. ■