I am humbled and honored to join the Centre family and to be with you tonight for this All-Campus Assembly. I am thankful to be joined tonight by my wife, Dina, and son Micah, and I know Marcus and his fiancée Caroline back in Memphis are grateful for this warm Centre welcome. Dina and I are also happy that her brother and niece, Bo and Brooke Pritchett, drove in from Indiana to surprise us and share in this event.

I am so appreciative to all of the search committee members who generously gave of their time and energy throughout the past six months of this search process. It has been my great pleasure to get to interact with them and feel their passion for this amazing College. I am particularly grateful to Mark Nunnelly, our Board Chair, and the entire Board of Trustees at Centre for warmly welcoming Dina and me to this community. Centre’s trustees are dedicated and passionate alumni and friends who consistently give of their time, talents, and resources to help make Centre the amazing place that it is. Dina and I pledge to the Board of Trustees and to all of you, the members of the Centre community, that we will dedicate ourselves to the service of this College with all of our energy, passion, and life commitment.

There has never been a more important time than right now for Centre College to thrive. More than ever, our world needs educated people who have the breadth of knowledge and the skills to be engaged, thoughtful, and purposeful leaders. As a residential liberal arts college, Centre has stood for the past 200 years as a leader in the world of higher education. As I take on this leadership role in July, I will be proclaiming daily, without hesitation, that the education students receive at this College remains the best possible education for our global citizens and our 21st century leaders.

I have a very deep respect for the leadership at Centre and for the incredible faculty, administrators, coaches, and staff who have dedicated their professional careers to ensuring that Centre is a thriving and innovative learning environment. In the coming years, I look forward to having many opportunities to listen and learn from you as we join together to propel the College into its third century. I am particularly grateful that through the many challenges of our modern higher education landscape, President John Roush has consistently led Centre into a position of strength. President Roush has set the College on a firm foundation by
recruiting and retaining talented students and athletes, hiring a brilliant faculty and a dedicated group of professional staff and coaches, making wise fiscal management decisions, continuing to build and maintain a modern and beautiful campus, and having an ambitious fundraising plan to support student access to this excellent education. Beyond that, John and Susie Roush are exemplary for the care and passion they have for the Centre community. For 22 years they have led and nurtured the Centre community, and their legacy will stand the test of time. It is a huge honor to be called on to continue the amazing trajectory of this College, and I am eternally grateful to John and Susie for their incredible dedication to this fine institution.

Over the past decades, Centre has become increasingly famous for its strong alumni network, its dedicated faculty, its top-rated study abroad opportunities, its successful athletic programs, and the prominence of its supportive campus community. The Centre community values the art of intentional community making. As I look at this campus, I see a group of students, faculty, coaches, and staff across all the areas of the College who are on a common life journey, one in which we encourage the values of mutual admiration and support. This deep sense of purpose and the intentional community practices at Centre are two of the major reasons why the connections made here last a lifetime. As Centre community members, we value the growth and development of every student, encouraging each community member not only to grow in their personal attainment of knowledge but also to use that knowledge for the good of others. This is why Centre alumni have an excessively positive impact on their local communities and the world.

In the midst of all the headwinds pushing against us in the world of higher education, our ongoing challenge at Centre is to provide a cutting-edge and innovative education where every student can learn to be a thriving and contributing citizen of our diverse and often complicated world. Our purpose is to prepare scholars, artists, business and non-profit leaders, teachers, lawyers, and experts across many career paths to be empathetic thought-leaders at the vanguard of their professions.

The magic formula in this thoughtful educational process starts with our amazing students, who are well-prepared, curious about our world, and willing to dive into our innovative learning environment to take full advantage of what Centre has to offer. As your president, I pledge to support these inquisitive and adventurous students as they use their
intellectual skills and many talents to seek knowledge and understanding that they can apply in our broader world.

Our amazing students are taught and mentored by an extremely well-educated, talented, and devoted group of faculty, coaches, and professional staff members who seek out and grapple with diverse ideas and perspectives. These skilled teachers and scholars are themselves life-long learners who are innovative and adaptable thinkers, teachers, mentors, artists, and scientists. My goal in the coming years is to do everything possible to provide our students, staff, and faculty the resources, spaces, and time needed to hone their skills as speakers, writers, explorers, scientists, performers, athletes, artists, and critical thinkers to build a firm and broad foundation of knowledge and skills that our students can use in all of their future careers.

This must be part of an effort to support students as they master critical skills through an innovative curriculum that is built on the principles of diversity, breadth, and depth. This amazing liberal arts curriculum is bolstered by and should work in tandem with a wide range of engaged co-curricular experiences that include athletics, Greek life, internships, research with faculty, clubs, community service, and many other amazing campus opportunities. I am proud to join a community in which so many student-athletes and organizational leaders are dedicated to setting high goals for themselves both inside and outside the classroom. I value these great opportunities for service and leadership. As your President, my goal will be to increase these engaged learning opportunities on and off campus, helping the Centre community continue to expand its opportunities for high student achievement, developing connections from the College to our external communities and partners.

As we move forward together, we will continue to be intentional about building a diverse and inclusive community, one that insures that the full benefits of a Centre education are embraced and experienced by all students. I will work daily to insure that the incredible Centre education is accessible to diverse students from the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the region, the nation, and the world. In our third century, Centre will continue to provide a very challenging and rigorous intellectual experience, even as we increase the ways we support every learner and as we become a more diverse community. We will be dedicated to helping every Centre community member become more resilient as we all adapt to our rapidly changing world. As students, faculty, and staff at Centre, we will seek out new ideas; we will surround ourselves with people who have different ways
of thinking and different lenses on the world; and we will value working and thinking with people who may not look like us or have the same identities or speak the same languages.

At Centre, we know that diversity is truly the hallmark of our liberal arts education. I look forward to working with you in the coming years to ensure that we continue to build a richly diverse community of scholars and learners who will be influential leaders in our world. Because of our diverse and rigorous intellectual learning environment, we will continue to graduate life-long learners who are innovative, bold, and mature thinkers. Our daily goal is to provide our students with the skills that will allow them to be prepared for a full and meaningful life ahead, regardless of their future challenges. Because of their broad preparation in the liberal arts and sciences, as our students go into graduate and professional programs, and as they start their careers, they should have the skills to learn quickly, to be agile thinkers, and to adapt to their changing circumstances. This experience at a residential liberal arts college is truly the most effective preparation for successful and meaningful careers that no robot will ever replace.

Centre College is one of the few places on the planet where we can consistently provide opportunities to talk honestly and openly about difficult issues. We can grapple together in a responsible manner about questions related to our identities. We can think deeply and explore the historical roots and modern manifestations of our shared social and political constructs and traditions. What we have here at Centre is so incredibly powerful. Through these deep and prolonged conversations, we build a foundation for life, a foundation for good, a foundation for challenging each other to be better, more thoughtful people who strive to use our wisdom to solve entrenched social, economic, and scientific problems.

Centre is a community of curious learners who are willing to take chances. Learners who challenge each other to go outside of our comfort zones, meet new people, travel to new places, and seek out opportunities to learn new ideas and skills. A challenging learning environment in a supportive and inclusive campus culture will continue to result in very high personal and professional outcomes for our graduates. In my estimation, our combination at Centre of both a highly challenging and a thoroughly supportive educational environment is the magic formula that will lead us to the highest reward we can seek as humans, that is: to seek a fulfilling and meaningful life.
Thirty-five years ago, as an 18-year-old student I wandered about a university campus curious about what life might bring, not knowing what my future would hold. I had a job at UPS working nights. I spent my days making new friends, and I was thrilled and challenged by my college classes. That first semester, I signed up for a required World Civilization history class. I had been in that class for several weeks when I first realized that I was quite intimidated by my professor. To me, he was wise beyond words and I was fascinated by the fact that as a 60-year-old person he still exhibited a curiosity about so many things in the world he had yet to experience or learn. I knew he had high expectation for his students, and I tried so hard in that class to keep up with the readings and class discussions. When he called on me in class, I wanted so much to say the right answer and impress him with my budding historical knowledge. But I vividly remember feeling overwhelmed. I thought I could pass the class, but I had a strong feeling that it would be the last history class I ever enrolled in. Each day at the start of that semester I walked into that classroom and sat down and quickly realized that I was in way over my head.

Picture this 18-year-old walking down the sidewalk on a sunny afternoon a few months into that semester, seeing this intimidating history professor coming towards him. I’m looking to see if there is a way to escape, or something that I can hide behind. But, no, it’s too late! My professor has seen me and he’s coming directly towards me. Dr. Marcus Orr was in a wheelchair. He had been shot in the back in World War II as a 19-year-old U.S. soldier. When I met him 40 years later, he was a renowned scholar of medieval art and history, and he was moving directly towards me as if he wanted to speak to me. As he approached, he said, “Mr. Moreland how are you today?” And I said, “Hello, Dr. Orr. I’m doing well.” He said, “Mr. Moreland, I was curious, what’s your major?” I replied that I didn’t have a major. In response, he simply said, “That’s very interesting. Mr. Moreland, I’d like to see you in my office tomorrow at 3 o’clock.”

This challenged and intimidated 18-year-old student had a brief sidewalk conversation with one of his professors. That may seem like a very mundane story, and, really, it is. But to me that was a moment of great transformation. As I reflect on that brief conversation, I often think about just how easy it can be to have a positive impact on somebody’s life. And I think about just how fortunate I was that Dr. Orr took an interest in me. I’m proud of my 18-year-old self that I actually followed up on that brief sidewalk conversation, and I showed up at my professor’s office the next day at 3 o’clock.
That office conversation was the beginning of a wonderful and supportive mentoring relationship that lasted for many years. Dr. Orr challenged the way I conceived of the world. He introduced me to new ideas and concepts that I still think about to this day. As an advisor, he suggested I take the most difficult courses at the university. As a mentor he helped me think about graduate programs and prepared me for the rigors of completing my Ph.D. We often talked about great literature and art, politics and world events, racism and ableism. We talked about the meaning of life. He challenged me to take up big questions and to think broadly and deeply about my values, purpose, and meaning.

I am so happy to be joining a campus community that values this type of mentoring relationship. Every day at Centre, students are having similar conversations with their professors, coaches, staff members, and peers. Their worlds are expanding as their sense of curiosity and adventure leads them down new paths of knowledge. As I join this community, I’m dedicated to ensuring that we continue the great tradition of challenging our students to have lofty goals and high expectations for their lives. I’m dedicated to ensuring that every student here at Centre knows that they belong, and that in the midst of this challenging learning environment, that they will have a supportive community that can help them lay a foundation for meaningful lives of leadership and service. I look forward to working with all of you as we learn and grow together, developing a broad foundation for our mutual pursuit of meaningful, successful, and purposeful lives. Thank you for allowing me to join you on this amazing educational adventure.