

Remarks by Joseph A. Condo, recipient of the Clarence M. Dunnville Jr. Achievement Award, delivered at the Annual Meeting

If you do this long enough, and you're even moderately involved with bar service, you're bound to accumulate a lot of trophies. And so it is with me.

And I don't mean to minimize or diminish the others when I say that this tops them all. To be associated, even in a small way, with Clarence Dunnville, a giant who stands shoulder to shoulder with Oliver Hill, Samuel Tucker and Thurgood Marshall, is an incredible, and humbling, honor.

Much as I'd like to think of myself in this way, I'm not a champion, and I'm not a hero. Scripture says that from those to whom much is given, much is expected. We in the legal profession enjoy a multitude of blessings, both material and spiritual, so much is required of us. During my long professional career I've just tried to answer that call and meet those requirements.

I've often thought that we shouldn't recognize and single people out for just doing what we're all expected to do. I suppose that in a perfect world, we wouldn't have to. But it's not a perfect world, and we need reminders. So in that spirit, I proudly accept this honor, for however much it may spur others to act who have not done so before.

In my speech at my installation as president of the Virginia State Bar 17 years ago, I quoted this Russian proverb: "A man learns the meaning of life when he plants a tree in whose shade he will never sit." And when I began this effort to broaden access to our profession, I accepted that I would not be sitting in the shade of this tree that I was planting.

How wrong I was!

The Young Lawyers Conference accepted the challenge and brought forth the Oliver Hill-Samuel Tucker Institute, and over the years hundreds of black high school students dared to dream that they could become members of this profession, and many of them are practicing law today.

Then along came Manny Capsalis, and asked me to "come out of retirement" to chair the task force that resulted in the creation of this conference.

And we observe another glorious milestone tonight, as Doris Causey becomes the first African American, the fifth woman, and the first legal services lawyer to become president of the Virginia State Bar.

The cool shade of this tree is the more satisfying for its being so unexpected.

Deuteronomy admonishes us, “Justice, justice, shalt thou pursue,” and lest we get too carried away patting ourselves on the back for these accomplishments, I remind you that there remains heavy lifting to be done to advance diversity and pursue justice, in the legal system and beyond.

State legislatures are moving in dozens of states to restrict minority access to the franchise under the pretext of combatting mythical voter fraud.

Yes, same sex marriage is the law of the land, but so-called religious-liberty laws that would sanction discrimination against gay persons are springing up like weeds.

And while Confederate monuments are being taken down across the South, there’s still a Confederate monument running the U.S. Justice Department.

In the 2000 movie “Keeping the Faith,” there is a scene where a young priest is experiencing a crisis in his commitment to his vows and his religious vocation, and goes to see his mentor, a monsignor. One of the things the monsignor tells him is this:

You cannot make a real commitment unless you accept that it’s a choice you keep making again, and again, and again.

These are dangerous times. The powerful forces of entrenched privilege and exclusion are resurgent. And we have to keep making the commitment to the pursuit of justice, to diversity and to inclusion, again, and again, and again.

I am grateful beyond words for this honor, and I will cherish it all the rest of my days.