



HILLSDALE COLLEGE

PURSUING TRUTH · DEFENDING LIBERTY SINCE 1844

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Hillsdale College Holds 174th Commencement Ceremony Featuring Erika Kirk

The annual ceremony included conferral of degrees and announcement of top academic graduates.

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College held its 174th Commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 9. The College conferred undergraduate, graduate, and honorary degrees. Erika Kirk, CEO of Turning Point USA and widow of its founder, Charlie Kirk, delivered the Commencement address.

“This is our greatest gathering,” said Hillsdale College President Larry P. Arnn. “We will remember that our suffering has meaning. We will remember that our suffering gives joy, produces joy, knowledge, and good actions that come from it and relieve our suffering and deepen our friendship. This is why, despite all the change, we are gathered here to do what we always do. Commencement is about the future.”

This year, 350 undergraduates from the class of 2026 received their degrees, along with 38 graduate students. Ashley R. DeVore and Noah Tom Larrick were co-valedictorians, and Patrick J. McDonald was salutatorian. The class also included a 2025 Truman scholar and two Fulbright award recipients. This year’s honorary degree recipients were Charlie and Erika Kirk, Joseph A. Banach, Stephen “Tony” Batman, and Eleanor E. Flack.

Dr. Arnn introduced Kirk, who addressed the graduating class.

“I think she’s tough. You need that. You need grace. You need beauty. You need tough. You need smarts. Now these qualities are called forth from Erika. She’s maligned while aggrieved,” Dr. Arnn said. “A lost generation needs some help, and now it’s Erika’s job to help give it to them.”

Kirk said that learning elevates our thinking so that we can help bring solutions to a disordered world.

“Through his learning, Charlie was better able to recognize his duty to pursue truth and to defend liberty, and this responsibility — he felt to God, he felt it to our family, to our country, and that was born from what he learned,” Kirk said. “All of you students here that are graduating, you have learned about the permanent things, and you share in that responsibility to be a part of the solution for this nation and this world.”

Kirk encouraged the graduating class to follow her husband’s example.

“As you continue forward in life, I want you to kind of embrace the similar blueprint of my husband, where he loved to point out that God made us purposeful beings, and continue forward in life with clarity and intention,” Kirk said. “You will come to understand that life is not defined by the abundance of options but by the weight of the choices that you make within them, and those choices more often than not are not dramatic or obvious but quiet and compounding, forming the blueprint of your life long before anyone else can see what you are building. Each of us must order his own house, live rightly in aim for high and beautiful things.”

Kirk is the CEO and chair of Turning Point USA, roles to which she was appointed following the assassination of her husband Charlie Kirk in September 2025. She received a bachelor’s degree in political science and international relations from Arizona State University and a Juris Master in American legal studies from Liberty University. Her professional activities involve nonprofit and entrepreneurial ventures and include hosting the “Midweek Rise Up” podcast and leading PROCLAIM x BIBLEin365, a clothing and lifestyle company that seeks to equip believers to live out their faith and to learn the word of God from cover to cover.

During Commencement weekend, the College unveiled plans for a plaque honoring Charlie Kirk to be placed in the undercroft connecting the library to the student union. The area is currently under construction.

Senior Class President Ty Ruddy addressed his graduating classmates, encouraging them to approach life after graduation with humility.

“The class of 2026 will produce the educators, politicians, mothers, and fathers that will guide a generation,” Ruddy said. “If we are to be the great men and women Hillsdale has prepared us to be, we should meet that call with earnestness, let God’s plan map our ambition. We should strive and seek and find — and laugh when we make our shoes muddy — and once in a while stand with our neighbors at the fence and talk about the tomatoes.”

Hillsdale College has held its Commencement ceremony every year since 1860. Recent Commencement speakers have included psychologist Jordan Peterson, Bishop Robert Barron, “Wheel of Fortune” host Pat Sajak, and historian Victor Davis Hanson.

For photos from the Commencement ceremony, click [here](#). Photos from other Commencement weekend events will be uploaded [here](#). A recording of the Commencement ceremony will be available on the College's [YouTube channel](#). For photos of Hillsdale College, click [here](#). For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than 7.5 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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