

Dr. Calvin Mackie Delivers Powerful Commencement Address At Xavier University, Receives Honorary Doctorate

Dr. Mackie inspired the graduates, sending a strong message that they could overcome barriers and obstacles if they believed in themselves and have hope

NEW ORLEANS, LA, UNITED STATES, May 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dr. Calvin Mackie, founder and CEO of [STEM Global Action](#), delivered a deeply emotional and energetic

[commencement address](#) to the graduates of the Xavier University of Louisiana Graduate Programs and College of Pharmacy. During the milestone celebration, Xavier University also awarded Dr. Mackie an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters, recognizing his relentless dedication to education, equity, and community service.

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Hope is the only thing that got us to where we are today. Hope is that little voice in your head that whispers, maybe, when the whole world is screaming no.”

Dr. Calvin Mackie

Dr. Mackie opened his address by acknowledging the profound personal connection his family shares with Xavier University. He celebrated his wife of 27 years, Tracy Ransom Mackie, a 1993 graduate of the Xavier School of Pharmacy. He also recognized his two sons, Myles and Mason, noting that Xavier played a foundational role in their early education. Both sons attended the university's summer science and math camps, laying the groundwork for their current academic pursuits in robotics, economics,

and data science at top universities.

Addressing the graduates, Dr. Mackie celebrated their dedication and perseverance, stating, "You did the work, you finished the race—job well done. Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations." He acknowledged the vital role of the faculty, staff, and administration in preparing the graduates for the demands of the 21st century, and told the audience, "Many prayers were answered today. We get to see many hopes and dreams come into fruition." He further honored the families, friends, and mentors, adding, "Let's give them a hand—those who



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supported you through your lives."

The core of Dr. Mackie's address focused on the critical importance of hope and how it can lead to success. He urged the graduates to carry hope into every room they enter and to share it with everyone they meet, reminding the audience that hope has historically been the driving force behind monumental achievements, societal shifts, and personal triumphs. His message was certainly that, as Black graduates entering the workforce at a moment when American society is turning back the clock on racial gains, they can overcome the barriers and achieve their dreams.



"Hope is the only thing that took us from where we were. Hope is the only thing that got us to where we are today," Dr. Mackie said. "Hope is that little voice in your head that whispers maybe when the whole world is screaming no."

In encouraging Black students that they could be successful, Mackie said, "Remember that Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't assassinated because he had a dream. Martin Luther King was assassinated because he got up every day and tried to make his dream come true. And you have to get up every day and make your dream come true. Hope is a thing that took a 47-year-old man in South Africa and sent him to jail for 27 years. And he came out as a world leader. Hope is what sent Mae Jameson into space. Hope is what took Jay Z from "Big Pimpin" (hit song) to a billionaire. Hope, the thing that took Oprah Winfrey from Tennessee State and the backwoods of Mississippi to the top of Hollywood."

Drawing from his own life story, Dr. Mackie detailed his journey from the neighborhoods of New Orleans to the highest levels of academic and professional success. He described facing constant rejection and doubt during his youth. Despite starting his college career in remedial reading and developmental math due to low standardized test scores, he refused to accept the limitations others placed on him. Empowered by the early encouragement of an uncle who believed he could become an engineer, Dr. Mackie eventually earned four STEM degrees, including a mathematics degree from Morehouse College and a doctorate in mechanical engineering from Georgia Tech.

He emphasized that Xavier has given graduates powerful validation for their journey ahead, stating, "You don't have to bend down to no man, no woman, no institution when you leave here,

because Xavier has validated you—they validated you." Dr. Mackie encouraged the graduates to meet the world with assurance and pride in their accomplishments: "Walk into every room with your chest out knowing that you have earned your way there." He further inspired them, declaring, "I never needed an entertainer, a celebrity, or somebody with money to tell me that I had greatness in my DNA because I had a family. I had a community, I had a church, I had Xavier."

Dr. Mackie also shared the practical wisdom of his ancestors, specifically recalling the invaluable lessons his grandmother imparted.

"My grandmother gave me six lessons—if you hold on to 'em, they'll transform your life," he said. He urged graduates not to lose sight of the foundational wisdom that allowed previous generations to endure and overcome immense adversity, saying, "We can't forget the wisdom that allowed our grandparents to survive everything they survived in Jim Crow," and maintaining that in today's racial climate, his brother, "John Crow," is present.

Further, Dr. Mackie challenged the graduates to take these sayings into their lives—"Every closed eye ain't sleep. Every goodbye ain't gone. Everything done in the dark will come to light. Misery loves company. Birds of a feather flock together. And if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas"—and apply this generational wisdom as they navigate modern challenges, urging them to construct a clear vision and plan for their families and communities.

He also focused on the responsibility to serve others, warning the graduates against getting caught up in the pursuit of material wealth at the expense of community impact. He challenged them to honor the people who helped them succeed by paying that support forward.

There are two types of wealth in this world. First type of wealth is making money. That's the lowest form of wealth," Dr. Mackie stated. "Second form of wealth is making a difference. That's the greatest form of wealth. In all you're getting and all you're doing, make sure you service and help somebody because somebody helped you to get here, and you should honor them with your service."

This philosophy of service is the driving force behind Dr. Mackie's work. In 2013, he and his wife invested their own funds to launch [STEM NOLA](#), a community-based program designed to bring science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education to children in under-resourced communities. The massive success of STEM NOLA laid the groundwork for the 2021 launch of STEM Global Action, which replicates this highly effective teaching approach nationwide.

Through these initiatives, Dr. Mackie has impacted over 250,000 students, engaging families, volunteers, and college students in hands-on STEM festivals and educational activities. By introducing young people to drone construction, robotics, and rocket launching, his programs spark curiosity and create tangible pathways to high-growth careers in fields like healthcare and engineering. This work actively bridges the wealth gap and transforms community outcomes

across the country.

Dr. Mackie closed his commencement address with a powerful anecdote about a conversation with his wife regarding his relentless travel and work schedule, recalling, "When you serve others, there will be sacrifices. I know the price of service." He explained that his drive comes from a deep desire to leave nothing on the table when his life is over, telling graduates: "If the plane goes down, there's only one word I want on my tombstone—and that's 'empty,' because I want the world to know I gave it my all." He left the Xavier University graduates with a final, stirring call to action.

"Live full, serve others, and die empty," Dr. Mackie said.

ABOUT STEM GLOBAL ACTION

In 2013, Dr. Calvin Mackie founded STEM NOLA, a New Orleans non-profit committed to expanding STEM education, particularly in communities of color. His goal is to make STEM education available in ALL communities. In July 2021, Dr. Mackie launched STEM Global Action, a campaign and network of affiliates that pursue STEM education for children, parents, and communities. Dr. Mackie holds a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Morehouse College, as well as a Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from Georgia Tech. An archive of the Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie podcast at

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_UPXlrgkzwsXFiefgOpgYIUNzD-T3iaw

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