

THOMAS D. CASSADY

University of Cincinnati Alumni Association Robert E. Dobbs Distinguished Service Award

Thomas D. Cassady, A&S '76, Hon '19
Acceptance Remarks | April 16, 2026

*"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."
— William Shakespeare, Hamlet*

Attitude is not something we inherit — it's something we choose. How we think shapes how we lead, how we serve, and how we respond when things are hard.

Pope Francis expressed it this way: "The first step is to start with courage. Courage leads to joy, and joy leads to hope."

That progression — courage, joy, and hope — has stayed with me. Because hope is not passive. It doesn't emerge from comfort. Hope begins when people choose to act with courage on behalf of institutions and communities they care deeply about.

Hope for an institution. Hope for a health system. And hope for a city whose future is inseparable from both.

Receiving the Robert Dobbs Service Award is deeply humbling. Bob and Kim Dobbs represent the very best of civic service — quiet stewardship, long-term thinking, and a belief that institutions matter because people matter. To be associated with that legacy at the University of Cincinnati is a true honor. Please recognize Kim Dobbs — here tonight.

If there is one theme that has guided my service, it is this: UC matters — not just as a university, but as a force for opportunity, mobility, and community transformation.

I've seen that impact most clearly through our students. UC's commitment to first-generation students is one of the most hopeful expressions of who we are. When this university chose to invest in a learning-living community designed specifically for students whose families had never navigated higher education, it wasn't just a program — it was a statement. And the results, measured in graduation, confidence, and life trajectory, prove that intentional investment changes lives and families.

That is what hope looks like when it is put to work.

Hope also requires discipline. Public higher education has faced relentless pressure over the last two decades — declining state support, rising costs, and the easy temptation to shift the burden onto students and families. UC chose a harder path. Freezing tuition repeatedly, demanding efficiency, and asking uncomfortable questions about cost and value were not easy decisions. They were hopeful ones.

Because hope, when taken seriously, becomes accountability.

My hope for the University of Cincinnati is that it never loses sight of access and affordability as moral commitments — not slogans. Education remains one of the most powerful engines of social mobility we have. If we allow it to become inaccessible, we weaken not only our institutions, but our democracy.

That hope is strengthened by leadership.

I want to specifically recognize President Neville Pinto, whose effectiveness is rooted in his long-term commitment to this university and his willingness to truly own the responsibilities of leadership. Neville models discipline, work ethic, and strategic clarity. He understands that culture is shaped not by speeches, but by consistency. My hope for UC is that it continues to benefit from leaders who are willing to stay the course, make hard decisions, and trust the community they serve.

That same sense of hope — and realism — must extend to UC Health.

UC Health is not just a clinical enterprise; it is a critical part of our academic mission, our research engine, and our regional safety net. Today, academic health systems across the country are facing extraordinary economic pressure. Changes in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, rising labor and supply costs, and increasing demand for care — especially from our most vulnerable populations — have created real financial strain.

These challenges are complex, structural, and largely outside the control of any single institution.

And yet, hope matters here more than ever.

I want to recognize Corey Shaw, President and CEO of UC Health, whose leadership during this period reflects courage, transparency, and resolve. Leading a health system through economic uncertainty while preserving clinical excellence, research integrity, and academic mission is not easy work. It requires balance, alignment, and trust. My hope is that UC and UC Health continue to move forward together — more aligned, more collaborative, and more unified in purpose — because the strength of one is inseparable from the strength of the other.

Hope also extends beyond our campus.

UC is an urban university, and that identity carries responsibility. Our relationship with the City of Cincinnati is not optional — it is foundational. Strong partnerships with public schools, neighborhoods, civic leaders, and businesses are not acts of charity; they are acts of shared investment. When Cincinnati thrives, UC thrives. When UC leads, Cincinnati benefits.

Hope for this city means rejecting complacency. It means embracing diversity as a strength, not a talking point. It means understanding that intellectual and civic growth require engagement with people who do not look like us, think like us, or share our assumptions.

Hope also requires good governance — the quiet, disciplined work of stewardship. Boards and leaders serve institutions best when they focus on strategy, fiduciary responsibility, and leadership development, and resist the temptation to drift into operations. Institutions weaken when governance loses its lane. My hope is that UC continues to model governance that is principled, restrained, and focused on the long term.

If I have one concern as I reflect on my service, it is the pace of change. Universities are designed to endure, but endurance should never become an excuse for inertia. The greatest risks often emerge during periods of success — when urgency fades and comfort sets in. Hope demands motion. Leaders must agitate for progress, welcome debate, and act with intention.

Finally, hope is personal.

I am deeply grateful to the students and faculty who give this institution its soul; to the administrators and staff who do the hard work every day; to colleagues who believe that service is not a résumé line but a responsibility; and to my family — especially my wife Karen — who shared the sacrifices that service requires and never once asked for recognition.

So tonight, I accept this award not as a capstone, but as a reminder.

That thinking makes things so. That hope is a choice. And that the future of the University of Cincinnati, UC Health, and the City of Cincinnati is worth choosing — again and again.

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