



**On this day, The Vandenberg Coalition joins the rest of the nation in mourning the loss of our brave servicemembers at the Abbey Gate terrorist attack on August 26, 2021. Today and every day, we strive to honor their and their families' sacrifice, bravery, and commitment to service.**



**A Note From Our Executive Director Carrie Filipetti:**

Last year, near the two year anniversary of the Abbey Gate terrorist attack, I was honored to be invited to the [Moral Compass Federation](#) and [Operation Allies Refuge Foundation](#) Remembrance Dinner. It was a night to honor the thirteen servicemembers who gave their lives in service to their nation, the Gold Star families who raised them, and the hundreds of American civilians who spent tireless hours volunteering to support the evacuation of our allies after America's devastating decision to retreat.

It was an evening that should never have been. We should have never lost thirteen of our bravest soldiers, Marines, and sailors. The fathers and mothers in the audience should have been raising a glass in honor of their children's commitment to public service, remarkable achievements, and promising futures - not in memoriam of their deaths. The juxtaposition of the ultimate

sacrifice these men and women made for their country - and the way in which their country was not there for them in return - was difficult to bear.

As I reflected on the anniversary this year, looking into the eyes of the fallen, I realized that the words I most want to say were already said. **Timothy "Tito" Torres**, the Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of the Moral Compass Federation, a [Pat Tillman Scholar](#), Masters degree graduate at Georgetown University, and a U.S. Army Ranger for the last 18 years, opened last year's dinner with some of the most evocative and searing reflections on what it means for those who answer the call to serve, and how those who survive them can best honor their memory. Tito deployed to combat 11 times in support of the Global War on Terror, with nine of those deployments to Afghanistan. During his time in combat, Tito earned two bronze stars, a Purple Heart, and numerous awards with valor. He continues his service to our nation and its servicemembers through the Moral Compass Foundation, a collaboration of 25+ non-profits honoring promises to our allies and addressing moral injury among Veterans, Gold Star, and Blue Star families. His words are powerful, challenging, and deeply important, both for servicemembers and non-servicemembers alike. You can find them below.

*Thank you for your service.*

*How does that sentence make you feel? What is your response right now?*

*Every service member has heard it - in an airport, in line for coffee, at the ballpark with your kids. It's hard to stomach, right? Hard to stomach through the pain of losing trust and faith in a country who ignored the wars and turned a blind eye to the men and women who bore the weight and responsibility over and over again.*

*There is a relative ease of the phrase...it kind of falls off your tongue.*

*Thank you for your service.*

*But there's nothing easy about serving, is there? Many in the room tonight can attest to that. You were handed a terrible task. You did your duty well, in a situation that was morally reprehensible, especially in the last days of August 2021, a situation which ultimately cost the lives of thirteen men and women. The pain of that moment, the hurt that doesn't fade with time, and the heroes that gave their lives, this is the reason we're gathered tonight.*

*Thank you for your service.*

*It's kind of...toothless, you know? It's...passive. But you're not. You are all men and women of action. You were placed in an impossible situation, and you acted. You came home and saw a dire need for change, and you acted. You saw citizens, government, even the military, fail you, and you acted.*

*You don't want to be thanked for your service. You want to act and to have that action noticed and catch fire.*

*Action works. Veterans helping veterans is powerful. I see all of you and how this community has rallied around one another and the difference that has made and is making.*

*Thanking you for your service doesn't work. Action works. Moral Compass Federation is proud to work with Operation Allies Refuge, a truly action-based organization, and a pillar within our federation addressing health concerns in veterans. And OAR isn't alone. You are not alone.*

*For years, my reaction to "thank you for your service" was "You just don't get it." But the reality is different, as illustrated by the people in this room tonight. There is a message of hope and goodwill because the vast majority of those who thank you - they mean it.*

*They just don't know what else to do but offer an empty platitude. They don't know **how** to help, **how** to support, **what to do**. They share our values but lack our insight into tangible solutions tailored to our community.*

*Now, when someone says thank you for your service, I no longer react with frustration. This is a gift. An opportunity to teach and share and grow. When we push away those who don't understand, we contribute to a country that does not appreciate or understand or remember its warriors.*

*This evening we're gathered to honor those we've lost, celebrate those in the fight, and empower a broader community to join us in making a difference. So take that gratitude and turn it into an invitation. Respond to thank you for your service with "Thank you. I know an organization that helps veterans. How can I plug you in to make a difference?"*

*Just as we help one another, we can help those searching for a way to express their thanks to come into our world and find a new purpose to serve, just as we had a purpose to serve.*

*We are stronger when we collaborate and break silos, connecting mission-oriented downward focused veteran service organizations with all those who serve in their own way - Military, Gold Star families, Blue Star families, first responders, and civilians- like the industry supporters in this room. Those who stood up to lead, with action. Who have sacrificed as well, and whose souls hurt with ours every time moral coin is spent too cheaply.*

*Thank you for your service. Thank you for caring. Each of you is exactly who we've been waiting for. Let's work together to fix some of what's been broken.*

*There's another phrase that carries a heavy punch that I have seen embraced in this community: #neveravictim. Let me say this clearly: there are no victims in this room. This room is full of leaders. Of game-changers. Of men and women who have been to hell and back, who have lost brothers and sisters in arms like the 13 we honor tonight, and who said I am #neveravictim. This room is full of those who decided to get involved, to support, to connect, to take the action we seek in our leaders.*

*I want to leave you with one last thought as we remember the thirteen.*

*They say that every person dies three times. First, when the body ceases to function. Second, when the body is consigned to the grave—a tradition many of us have witnessed too many times.*

*The third death is that moment, an indefinite point in the future, when the fallen's name is spoken for the last time.*

*The next time someone says, "Thank you for your service," speak their name. Tell their story. Compel action instead of words.*

*Impart that name to someone who can carry it in a different, and no less important, vessel. This is how we make sure our fallen never live their final death. This is how we honor our past, repair our present, and improve our future. We are the moral compass of our generation. And we are never victims.*

*Stand up for those we've lost. And never let them live their final death.*

In honor of **Marine Corps Sgt. Nicole L. Gee, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza, Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover, Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss, Marine Corps Cpl. Hunter Lopez, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Rylee J. McCollum, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan R. Merola, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Kareem M. Nikoui, Marine Corps Sgt. Johanny Rosario Pichardo, Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared M. Schmitz, Navy Hospital Corpsman Maxton W. Soviak, and Marine Corps Cpl. Daegan W. Page.**

*"Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace."*

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*"Exalted, compassionate God, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering presence to all the men and women who gave their lives in defense of our country and the freedom of the world. Master of mercy, may they find eternal shelter beneath Your sheltering wings, and may their souls be bound up in the bond of life, together with the righteous souls who stand in Your Presence. May they rest with honor, and may their actions hasten the day when righteousness, peace and security shall prevail forever, when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they study war anymore.'"*



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