

(Embracing the medallion) It never occurred to me that in becoming a university president I would be receiving so much bling. It was my father who taught me that you always try to start with humor. It is in his memory that I dedicate this new ministry.

Bishop Finn, Archbishop Naumann, Father Morrissey, Father McMahan, members of the Society of Jesus, my confreres in the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, elected members and delegates of our local, state and national government, Chairman McCullough, Trustees, Regents, Alumni, Faculty Staff, Students, fellow presidents, college and university delegates, guests, neighbors, and friends,

please say hello to my mother:

Ann McGrath Curran

Adjusting to the responsibilities and duties of a university presidency begins with understanding the challenges and privileges associated with the position. I thought that the best way to begin this understanding and adjustment was to consult current college and university presidents. This consultation resulted in a few different assessments. One colleague told me: “You’ll be living in a big house, walking to work, and begging for a living.” Another summed it up this way: “Consider yourself in charge of a cemetery.

There are lots of people under you and no listens to you.” After receiving these assessments, I decided that it was time for me to start my own understanding and experience as the 14th president of Rockhurst University.

So, on the night before my first day as president, I wandered around the campus. I walked the academic areas, experienced the sights sounds, and smells of our residence halls, and then wandered over into the athletic area.

There I came upon the newly constructed tennis courts. After a few minutes of admiring this new campus amenity, I discovered that I had become locked into the facility. I was surrounded by a fence in excess of 15 feet.

It took me several minutes to discover the release levers. During that time, I considered a few options including scaling the fence, waiting for help, or calling security with the dual purpose of introducing myself and seeking a rescue. The desire to avoid the premature introduction to Security and preserve some self esteem was foremost in my mind and why the third option did not seem attractive. The next day I recounted my predicament to a few of university personnel. At that time, I discovered that my entire discernment was captured on the security cameras. What did I learn? A president must take time to understand how he got into a situation. All options for resolution should be considered. And one must know where to go for help. The first day.

I selected **Upon this Rock** as the theme for this inauguration. The selection has some obvious play on words for this university. This school was founded in 1910 by Fr. Michael Dowling on this wooded mound which would be called Rockhurst. However, I also selected it because it provides the context for the work of God's love and grace in the members of the Church who seek to build up the kingdom of God. It was Peter, the first apostle, who was commissioned as the successor to the earthly ministry of Jesus. He was told: "You are Cephas, or Peter," which really means rocky or the craggy one reflecting the roughness, angularity and lack of smoothness in this leader.¹ Therefore, I contend that Peter was chosen because of his imperfections and roughness not in spite of them.

The truth is that God chooses all of us in our humanity and incompleteness. In fact, it's in that humanity where we meet and experience the divinity of God. It's in that condition where He loves us unreservedly. The philosopher Paul Tillich captures it well when he says that we must have the courage to accept the fact that we have already been accepted. Francis de Sales encourages us with these words: "Be who you are and be it well."

For the Jesuits and followers of St. Ignatius Loyola, it consists in knowing that one is a sinner yet called to be a companion of Jesus. As a follower of

¹ Martin, My Life with the Saints

St. Francis de Sales, it's a matter of practicing true humility: a recognition that I'm totally dependent upon God for his mercy in the imperfections of my life as well as His grace for the things that are going well in my efforts.

I contend that the understanding of a partnership is the appropriate context for our shared ministry here at Rockhurst. Therefore, I ask that you join me in appreciating ourselves as redeemed sinners like Peter, Cephas, the Rock. We are all asked to bring our God given gifts, talents and wisdom to bear. I offer this understanding for your consideration and hope for your acceptance of this approach.

Allow me then, to give you the chance to respond to these invitations from my heart to yours. If you find them acceptable, I ask that you respond:

We are Rock.

To our students, undergraduate and graduate, you are Rock. Upon you, this university is centered. Embrace this opportunity fully even when it might seem to be without a horizon. Be assured that if you "got in," you can get out even if might involve a 5th year victory lap. Be willing to focus and reflect upon how and the way you think. Be less concerned about the accumulation of facts and content. Technology has assisted us in amassing, storing and cataloguing information. Rather, I invite you to allow this Jesuit experience to stir up in you a pure unrestricted desire to know, a quest to

find God in all of your experiences and in the lives of others. Permit yourselves to take calculated risks. Know that God has chosen you much like he chose Peter to lead his church. Heed the words of Pedro Arrupe, former superior general of the Society of Jesus who challenged all of us to “service of faith and promotion of justice.” For him, the goal of Jesuit education consists in the creation of “multiplying agents” known as “men and women for others.” And so I ask you, do you accept this challenge?

Students: We are Rock.

To our faculty, you are the heart of this rock. “A Jesuit school is to be a face-to-face community in which an authentic personal relationship between teachers and students may flourish.”² This relationship of trust and friendship is absolutely essential if we want to create an environment that is conducive to growth in our core values. Your reputation, your legacy and continued commitment to competence, conscience and compassion is the hallmark of Ignatian pedagogy. I pledge to you that I will do everything I can to assist you in this pursuit and in finding the resources to accomplish it. While we may differ in our understanding and approaches, I ask that we listen to one another and always deal with our students and with one another in charity in the example of the Teacher of all humanity. And so I ask, what is your response to this invitation?

² Kolvenbach, Ignatian Pedagogy Today, 2000

Faculty: We are Rock.

To our staff, you are the soul of this rock. A Jesuit university is concerned with the care and development of the whole person. You work tirelessly to help create the environment where our students, alumni, supporters and friends know that Rockhurst follows St. Ignatius Loyola's exhortation. That exhortation is this: we do all for the greater glory of God. Help me to enhance this environment where every member of this university community knows that he or she matters. Assist me in making sure that Rockhurst University is intentional about its opportunities for growth so that we can always state that we are "sized, so you matter."

And so I ask you, staff, if this reflects who you are, please respond:

Staff: We are Rock.

To our Alumni, Regents and Trustees, you fortify this rock. You represent our 16,000 graduates and current students who belong to this worldwide Jesuit network of more than 1.6 million from 186 colleges and universities. A core value of Rockhurst and all Jesuit enterprises is the pursuit of *Magis*. It's a Latin word meaning more. Help me pursue the *Magis* but not simply for the accumulation of resources. Instead, let us steward and build up our resources to build up the kingdom of God. If we take this approach, we will be citizens pursuing the *Magis*. Self absorbed kingdoms and fiefdoms will be vacated. So, let us take our collective missioning from the foundational

principle of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* where he writes that "we were created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord and by this means to save our souls. All other created goods are to be used to assist us in this pursuit." (#23). And so, I ask you, Alumni, Regents, and Trustees, who are you?

Alumni, Regents and Trustees: We are Rock.

To our friends, community members and neighbors you are an integral part of this Rock. I assure you that Rockhurst, Kansas City's Jesuit University is "in the city for good."

Together we must build the city of God. It needs to be a community where there is equal opportunity for education, a level playing field for personal development, and a chance to relish the consolations and desolations of being that imperfect rock. We may not be able to build the perfect city but we must do our part. Our God does not call us to be successful but he does call us to be faithful. In our faithfulness we will be blessed and know that we have done our part to make God's good world better.

If you are willing to join me in this effort, please give your assent:

Friends, Community members and Neighbors: we are Rock.

We all inherit the Catholic Intellectual tradition which consists of the intellectual treasures that we study and pass on as well as our traditions of experience, prayer, devotion and critical reflection. This tradition includes

such things as the blending of faith and reason, a rejection of exclusivity and elitism, a deep appreciation for other cultures and faith experiences, an integration of wisdom in the living of one's life,³ and a recognition of the sacramental notion of education that whatever humanizes us simultaneously makes us more like the God we seek. The most important Catholic inheritance is the tradition in natural law. This is rooted in the notion that there are and will always remain universal truths which can be sought and known. Additionally, we must always embrace liberalism in its best form: learning that replaces concerns with a particular vocation or profession with a greater emphasis upon a turn of mind, a habit of thought that is equipped with active citizenship and a concern for the people of God. Let us be life long learners rooted in the quest to find God in all things and all people. On the school shield which is behind me you find Rockhurst University's motto: *Sapientia aedificavit Sibi Domum* – Wisdom has built her house. There is also the symbolic bird from the family shield of Saint Thomas More, patron saint of Rockhurst University His example of justice, integrity and firm principle in public and family life resonates with the foundation for this house of wisdom which we continue to build here. May God continue to bless our efforts as he blessed the ministry of Peter, the rock. We have

³ Hellwig, *Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University*

every reason to be filled with hope knowing the same God who has begun the good work in us will bring it to completion.

We are rock and that will be enough.

Marianne Williamson summarized it best in her book, *A Return to Love*:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so other people won't feel insecure about you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. Upon this rock, we will build up this university, Rockhurst University, and in so doing build up the kingdom of God.

Let's Do It.
