



From the Office of the President

John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.

REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Welcome to Regis University
Family Reception during Orientation Week
Sports Authority Field
August 22, 2013**

Allow me to add to the chorus of welcomes to Regis University!

Like most of you, I am still fairly new to Regis. Still, after a year as an official member of the Regis University community, I want to let you know that I have fallen in love with our community of teachers and students. As some of you may know already, I have worked in Jesuit higher education for nearly thirty years as an English professor, an administrator, and as a trustee of several Jesuit universities. But the truth is that none of the other universities have moved me or captured my imagination, my affect as deeply as Regis has.

My initial remarks to you are both introductory and forward looking. I wish to say a bit about what you can expect at Regis and what the community is like.

But of course, since I'm an old English professor, I want to begin by telling a story. It's a story from an essay by the popular poet and spiritual writer, Kathleen Norris.

She wrote about the experience of being a guest in a school in North Dakota. While teaching poetry to grammar school children, Norris writes, "A strange thing happens when I enter a classroom as a visiting artist, to read poetry and eventually get the [students] to write. ... With me, they are suddenly handed a fresh slate. ... I've found that the kids that the teacher might have described as 'good students' will inevitably write acceptable but unexceptional poems and stories. The breathtaking poems come from left field, as it were, from the bad students, the ones teachers will say don't usually participate well in classroom activities" (*The Cloister Walk*, 53-54).

It was one of these so-called "little criminals" who took her breath away. On his paper, the ten-year old wrote "My Very First Dad." Norris learned a lot in checking back with the lad. She hadn't asked the students to write about anything personal but to work with similes and metaphors; he had chosen to write about his "very first dad." She complimented him on his similes and encouraged him; this pleased him and he worked hard at mining his truth, his exile, and his loneliness. Some of the most important aspects of love.



“He’d written of his father: ‘I remember him/like God in my heart, I remember him in my heart/like the clouds overhead,/and strawberry ice cream and bananas/when I was a little kid. But the most I remember/is his love,/as big as Texas/when I was born.’”

The lad told Norris, rather proudly, that he’d been born in Texas, but otherwise, he told her nothing else of his story. The returning regular teacher was simply stunned; she filled Norris in on the rest of the story. Norris was not surprised to learn that the little guy was not a good student. “‘He tries,’ she said, ‘but he’s never done anything like this before’ – but then she told Norris that the boy had never known his father; he’d skipped town on the day he was born.”

The right moment, with the right teacher “allowed this student to tell the adults in his life – his teacher, his mom, his stepfather – something they need to know: that a ‘very first dad’ looms large in his psyche. Like God in his heart ... a revelation from the depth of the boy’s soul.”

What really is happening in a classroom is the right moment, with the right teacher? It’s not restricted to grammar or high school students. It happens every day with students in universities; it happens in Regis University. It happens whenever a student opens up her or his soul to truth, a truth that will possibly hurt a little or a lot, the truth that will name the exile she or he has known for a long time. Such experience is the beginning of becoming whole. It is the process of education.

In the Catholic tradition, we have two words that name very well what happens in a classroom: **epiphany** and **revelation**. When we examine our truth, it’s a reminder from our God that the world and we ourselves are more mysterious and more cherished than we know.

Let me ask the parents and family members here: What was your favorite moment in your education? Was there a teacher or classmate who opened your eyes and your heart to a deeper reality? Was there a transformation in the way you know yourself and our world? That transformation is precisely the goal of Jesuit Catholic education. It is the legacy and promise of Regis University.

If there is a method to Jesuit higher education – and there is – it can be summed up by three other words: **Experience, Reflection, Action**. This constellation is the articulation of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm. St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, was a pragmatic romantic. At the foundation of all we Jesuits and colleagues do, there is this method of **Experiencing the real; Reflecting on what you have experienced; and Acting in accord with the best of your reflections on the experience.**



That's why Jesuit universities are extraordinary places. And that's why I am so proud and excited to serve at Regis University. The dynamic of moving from experience, through reflection, to acting in accord with what is learned demands rigor and compassion; it keeps Regis from being an ivory tower and assures that we remain engaged with reality, not fantasy, that we imagine new possibilities and opportunities.

Regis University aims at making learners into leaders. This is the place where the Church thinks and professors and students alike give back to the community in which we are placed. As any professor at Regis will tell you, we humans cannot learn unless we take up the struggle, take risks, sometimes make mistakes, and listen to voices with different opinions.

And so we live in a privileged place, a community that requires love and care. We need courage and diligence to fulfill the goal we have - to make the community thrive.

I think the reason I have come to love Regis is that we live out the Ignatian ideal of *cura personalis* better than any Jesuit school I know. *Cura personalis* is a Latin phrase that means "care for the whole person" - mind, body, and soul. Nowhere have I seen professors or staff more attentive to the individual student's needs. Personal relationships are the hallmark of what we do at Regis.

The Ignatian and Jesuit heritage you have chosen makes clear that the goal of any Jesuit work is to help people. Jesuit schools are not merely places to advance knowledge and do high powered research and do professional preparation - WE DO ALL OF THAT!! But Regis University has at the heart of our mission a deep concern for the growth and development of our students.

In short, and in the words of our Jesuit Superior General, Adolfo Nicolás, "Jesuit education should change us and our students. ... The meaning of change for our institutions is who our students become, what they value, and what they do later in life and work."

Let me speak directly to the new students now in our Regis community: You have all the gifts to succeed wonderfully in this worthy enterprise. You are learners who are also leaders among your peers. I will pray for you every day - as I hope you will for me - so that you will have the courage and diligence you need.

Thank you and God bless you!!