



*From the Office of the President*

**John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.**

REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**Spring Commencement Address - RC and RHCHP  
Regis University  
May 4, 2014**

First and foremost, I offer my congratulations to you graduates and acknowledge and thank your families and friends for their part in supporting you in your accomplishments that we celebrate today.

In addition, I want to express my admiration and appreciation for the faculty and staff of Regis University. I ask the faculty and staff to please stand and be recognized.

Allow me to add one more note of thanks to Bishop Richard Hanifen and Rabbi Howard Hirsch for their joint address to us - the first commencement address we have had in many decades.

Bishop and Rabbi, you embody the Regis University Jesuit mission of "leadership in service of others." You have answered positively the question that is an invitation at the heart of this University: "How ought we to live?"

In an age when passionate intensity and misguided religiosity too often trump reasoned discourse and true religion, we are all very grateful for what you have done for bringing believers of different faiths together in mutuality and reverence. You have afforded us a better future and more peaceful prospects. For that, we are most grateful.

Together, we have accomplished a marvelous thing in your life. And I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect on your achievements. But since I'm an old English professor, I need to begin with a true and brief story.

In a letter to his brothers George and Thomas written in 1817, the English Romantic poet, John Keats coined the term "negative capability." He wrote:

"Several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a man [we would say, person] of achievement...I mean negative capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, [and] doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason..."

In other words, negative capability, for Keats, was the skill of putting the perceived wisdom and local reason aside in order to be receptive or open to the world. Of course, Keats was referring to letting radical rationality drop away in order to fully experience the world in service of creating better poetry.



But in the Jesuit university context, our students and graduates also possess a kind of negative capability. They don't let the usual way the culture thinks about things get in the way. They don't let so-called reason or reasonableness become reasons to be discouraged, reasons to look the other way, reasons to accept the status quo. In other words, Jesuit university graduates – and specifically Regis University graduates – don't accept a status quo that keeps them from making a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

Keats called the geniuses to which he refers “men and women of achievement.” Around here, we just call them Regis people.

I wish I could take credit for that name, but it actually comes from a conversation I had with a student. I asked her what she loved most about our University and without hesitation she said, “Regis people.” I asked what she meant by that, exactly, and she told me a story. She was working on a paper that she'd started later than usual. It was due in two days and she'd come to a point where she felt stuck. There was a concept she didn't understand and she couldn't continue without clarification from her professor. But therein lay the problem: It was the weekend and, on top of that, she knew the professor was on vacation with his family. So, she hemmed and hawed for a bit before finally sending him an email, apologizing profusely, but saying she needed to talk. The professor responded and shortly thereafter they were on the phone. That professor spent a half-hour talking through the concept with her, putting his vacation on hold to help her understand. “That's a Regis person,” the student said to me. And it's a phrase that has stuck with me; one I've been thinking about ever since.

A Regis person – someone who goes beyond reasonable expectations to help others.

Ellen is a great example, a student graduating with you here today. Ellen played for our women's soccer team and served on the national Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. In her role, Ellen heard about a nonprofit called Team IMPACT, which matches children facing life-threatening illnesses with college athletic teams. Team IMPACT was looking for a school to be their flagship program in the West and Ellen thought Regis would be a perfect fit. As a result of Ellen's efforts, Daisy Walsh, a 7-year-old Aurora girl who is battling brain cancer was “drafted” by the women's lacrosse team this spring. Daisy joins practices, participates on the sidelines during games and even has a locker. Regis is the only school in the West working with Team IMPACT, and all of this was made possible by a business student who saw an opportunity to make a difference, and did. That is a Regis person.



Nenani is another great example. Nenani was born in Zambia. His mother, a human rights lawyer and activist, passed away when he was seven. As a result, Nenani and his brother were placed in an orphanage. That orphanage was connected to a Jesuit high school, which Nenani was able to attend, and that first taste of education lit a fire in his heart. So despite a “reasonable” trepidation, he applied for and got a scholarship to an International Baccalaureate program in the United Kingdom. He left his friends and everything familiar to him in order to pursue his dream. In the meantime, his brother was adopted by an amazing family in Colorado, and that family had a connection to Regis. Nenani was so impressed by stories of Regis that he decided to apply. He’s been with us ever since, an academic superstar in politics and economics, and a personable young man who has added much to our community. His next stop is graduate school with a focus on international trade sanctions. His long-term plan is international law and a return to Zambia, where he can make a lasting impact on the people there.

Someone brave enough to chase his dreams, who will use his gifts to serve others. That is a Regis person.

And finally, there is Christy. Christy came to Regis with a plan. She was going to study education and play volleyball. And she did, even earning RMAC Freshman Of The Year honors. But then something unexpected happened. She began to feel fatigued. Her moods became unpredictable. She felt like her body was shutting down. These health challenges persisted for a year and a half, eventually forcing her to give up volleyball. It was, according to Christy, a dark time, and she began to ask the question, “Why me?” Now, another person might have stubbornly held to the path they had chosen, or worse, let frustration overwhelm them. But not Christy. In that dark time, Christy opened herself to a new path. Inspired by her health challenges, she changed her major to nursing, and through her own research, figured out that most of her struggles could be traced back to food. As her health returned, she became more and more involved at Regis, serving as a peer minister, leading service trips and working in University Ministry. Today, she graduates with a degree in nursing and hopes to bring compassion to people who are struggling.

Someone who endures a personal challenge and comes back stronger; who will build on what she has learned to help others. That is a Regis person.

So, why say all this? Why share these stories on your day? It’s because these stories are really about you. You are Regis people. You have faced adversity. You have followed your heart. You make decisions every day that have the power to change lives – starting with your own. Your decisions change the world for the better.



Getting a degree, especially a degree from a Jesuit university, is no easy task. And in the end, that's why we're here today: To celebrate you and the family members and friends who have helped you come so far.

In a few minutes, your name will be called. You will walk across this stage and receive your diploma. It is a momentous achievement and one for which I offer my sincerest congratulations.

It's my hope that you will frame your diploma, maybe put it on your desk at your new job or hang it on your wall at home. But even more importantly, I hope you will remember that a degree from Regis University is more than a piece of paper that certifies the completion of your degree. It's better described as a promise – to yourself and to the world. It's a promise that you will use your gifts and skills to make the world a more humane and just place.

So, this is my charge to you, graduates of Regis University:

Live a life of moral conviction, one that seizes every opportunity to make a difference in the world.

Follow your heart – it may take you places you never imagined.

Be courageous in the face of changes and challenges and hard work – God most certainly has a plan.

Dream and strive and push beyond all reasonable expectations because that is who you are – Regis people.

Congratulations, graduates!!

Now I need only welcome you to the alumni association of Regis University. I will stay in touch.