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An Interview with Kevin Burke, S.J.

Jesuit Higher Education interviewed Fr. Kevin Burke, S.J., the new Vice President for University Mission at Regis University.

Father Burke had previously served on the faculty of two Jesuit graduate theology schools: Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Cambridge, Mass. (1997-2006) and the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Cal. (2006-2017); he also served as the Dean for six years at the latter appointment. From 2010-2017 he was a member of the Board of Trustees at Regis.

Father Burke was scheduled to begin his tenure at Regis on August 1, 2017, but he agreed to move his start date up by ten days so that he could speak and confer diplomas at Regis Commencements in Kakuma Camp, Kenya and Dzaleka Camp, Malawi at the end of July 2017. Kakuma Camp and Dzaleka Camp are two learning centers where the Regis Diploma is delivered via online coursework to refugee adult learners via Jesuit Worldwide Learning.

In this interview, Fr. Burke reflected on his work as well as on the Commencements:

On the Office of University Mission

“Embodying the mission of Regis University cannot be outsourced to a single office; it belongs to the entire University,” Fr. Burke stated. “The Office of Mission facilitates and supports mission efforts throughout our community. Our aim is to ensure that everyone at Regis feels invited and empowered to engage the University’s mission wherever and to whatever degree they feel comfortable.” To this end, the Office of Mission is designed to make the resources of the Office available to all members of the University community.

Father Burke continued that, when the time comes in the future when Regis no longer has a Jesuit as President—this is currently the case for 11 of the 28 Jesuit universities in the U.S.—we will be a University “capable of discerning *as a community*” with respect to future leadership so that Regis continues to thrive as a vibrant Jesuit university. Fr. Burke added that “our current



mission efforts are geared to deepen our University’s capacity for discernment by expanding and deepening our community’s participation in the University’s mission.” Thus, Fr. Burke’s focus in the Office of University Mission is to foster disciplined, thoughtful conversation about religion and religious thought, and to explore what it means for a religiously diverse community to embody the Jesuit mission of Regis. “There are deep spiritual currents throughout Regis,” Fr. Burke continued. “The well is deep. In a sense, the Office of Mission can serve as the water bearer—bringing the water up from the depths of the well to the surface.”

On the Commencements

“It was striking,” said Fr. Burke, “that my first experience of Regis was that of seeing Regis through the eyes of refugees at two camps several continents away from Denver, Colorado.” For the graduating students, Regis served as a window on the world. “Rather than seeing the refugee camp as a concentration camp,” one of the graduates said, “the Arrupe Center at Dzaleka Camp was transformed into ‘a meditation room,’ a place where the students could experience themselves as citizens of the world.” Regis University’s participation in the Jesuit Worldwide Learning initiative provides another example of how the Jesuit mission of Regis is alive in the world. Fr. Burke met Regis students in both Kakuma and Dzaleka who are engaged in making the camps more humane and hospitable, especially for children. He was introduced to two brothers, both

Regis Diploma graduates, who adopted three children who were orphaned by their mother. He met others who focus their energies on starting new grade schools with the scant resources available in the camps. “Everywhere I turned I encountered ‘men and women in service of others.’ Everywhere I looked I saw faith in action,” concluded Fr. Burke. HJE