



From the Office of the President

John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.
REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

Our Only Way Forward is Together
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As students return to university campuses, we are witnessing civil rights erosion that so many generations have fought for.

A year ago, we began our academic year following a summer of violence. One year later, we watched in disbelief the horror of Charlottesville.

These events are yet another example of what concerns so many of us here at Regis University and at our higher education peers in Denver. Our community has:

- Mourned the killings of unarmed African-Americans;
- Ached for the fears of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals students, immigrants and refugees; and
- Denounced violence against women and the mistreatment of good people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yet, our fears and disbelief multiply as hate speech is increasingly normalized. As a Jesuit, it is my calling to pray, think and act. I invite you to do the same. I believe in prayer that gives us courage, purifies our egos, sustains our commitment and recognizes that God is at work with us. I believe moral issues require rigorous thinking. I also believe in action that stands up to injustice.

As a Jesuit Catholic university president, I denounce white supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi ideology. Anyone who knows history knows that these movements are a cancer to a free society and have brought untold human suffering.

Regis has its own history resisting the KKK, which was a dominating political force in Colorado a century ago. As Klan groups burned crosses on South Table Mountain within view of what was then Sacred Heart College, the Jesuit teachers became concerned. In 1921, they changed the college's name to Regis in part because they feared "Sacred Heart" provided a "clear target." Two years later, word reached Regis that the KKK was gathering to raid campus. The schoolboys and their teachers grabbed bats and stood watch together to deter the bigoted marauders.

These forces of hate will fail again – if good people stand resolute and not fall victim to their deceit. This country is bigger than its differences. This world is larger than the forces that divide. From the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., to Mahatma Gandhi, to Jesus of Nazareth, we have living proof that love overcomes hate. We cannot settle for anything else.



However, the vexing struggle we face today was intensified by the president's failure to unequivocally condemn hate in Charlottesville. Far more common than public parades of haters are the covert and often overlooked or dismissed microaggressions rooted in bigotry, sexism and ignorance. The whispered remark, the rude online comment or blatant gibe reveals the gulf of misunderstanding that exists at many campuses, workplaces and communities.

We can't expect everyone to agree on everything. But our cultural, racial, socioeconomic, religious and identity differences are what the enemies of truth use to divide us. We need to be open to hearing each other's stories. We need to open our hearts and respond to hate not with more hate but the courage, kindness and hope that make us human. This is not an easy path. But we will fail when we let our biases define us. We will fail when we judge another's story. We will fail when we fall back upon the words "me" and "mine" rather than "we" and "ours."

When confronted by bias, we must approach each other peacefully and not run away from these painful divides or hold "them" at a comfortable distance. Rather, we must strive to build at every level of civic life what Pope Francis calls a "culture of encounter" and to begin to reimagine together a vision of the common good. "Faith is an encounter with Jesus," the pontiff says, "and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others."

We believe we can and will succeed in this difficult but sacred work because others have gone before us with challenges as big as ours, like Dr. King, who tell us that our only choice – our only choice – is to live together as sisters and brothers or perish together as fools.

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