

Dr. Jo Ann Rooney Inauguration Address

November 4, 2016

Go, set the world on fire! Saint Ignatius was not merely making a suggestion when he said this. It was not an idealistic notion or lofty, aspirational goal. It was a command, a challenge, an expectation, a mission. It is what unites all of us here today. Whether you have been a Loyolan for decades, years, days or you have joined with us for the first time today, this proclamation should resonate within all of us, not just at this moment, but as our connection, our bond for living our lives. It will certainly be the driving force behind our ongoing work here at Loyola University Chicago.

But, what does it really mean? There are so many questions facing higher education. What are the greatest challenges facing all colleges and universities now and into the future? What are the unique challenges we also face as a Jesuit, Catholic university and how do we address both? Are we in a position financially and programmatically to drive the changes that must occur? Are we willing to reach deep within ourselves, risk discomfort, confront ambiguities, and embrace change in order to take on the difficult societal issues facing us such as diversity, civil discourse, social justice, income inequality, and health disparities?

In the days ahead, we will be focused on our future together. However, now, let us pause for a few minutes and just be present in this moment. Be present to each other. Be present on this occasion and to this time in our history as a university. In this moment, let us be grateful—let us celebrate the path that was traveled to get us here and say thank you to all who were part of the journey. It is, after all, why we are able to be here.

I am truly at a loss for words to express my gratitude to each and every one of you here today. I can only think to say—thank you so much from the bottom of my heart. It is amazing being able to stand before all of you and share this special moment in the history of Loyola University Chicago. I am beyond humbled and honored to be part of this amazing community. All of you here are sharing the most special gift you can possibly give—that is the gift of your time, your presence, your support. You have travelled short distances and long. You share a

connection to Loyola that may extend years, possibly generations with those whose Loyola connection can be measured in days or hours.

This Loyola community is a wonderful testament to how hard work, teamwork, tenacity, drive, commitment, and sacrifice can elevate an organization to new levels. So while today symbolically marks the beginning of the next new exciting chapter for Loyola, let us acknowledge, embrace, and applaud the amazing strides over the past decade. We are positioned well to not only meet the challenges ahead but also take on ever more prominent roles as a world-wide higher education leader.

There are just a few more thank yous to several people that I would like to acknowledge. So many of you have been involved in organizing all aspects of the inauguration, keeping me as I wished on the periphery. But you took my primary point of guidance to heart, which was to please make this a community-wide celebration. You did an awesome job—thank you. A special thanks to the steering committee and their chief navigator, Lorraine. To the senior leadership team, staff, faculty, students, members of the Jesuit community, alumni, board members, external community supporters, presidents, delegates, and representatives from a number of colleges and universities, thank you so much for being here. My final thank you is reserved for my 22 family, extended family, and dear friends who have traveled here. While a few of our wonderful eclectic group could not be here in person, I know they are with us in spirit. Loyola community—I am so happy to be able to share my family with you and share you with my family. Whether you know me as student, friend, colleague, advisor, extended family, sailor, family, “auntie,” “2nd mom,” “lil sis,” daughter, or a blend of all—it means the world to me that you are all here. How can I thank each of you for so many years of love and support? I love you all.

Mom, you and Dad always have been there and never wavered in your support. I know Dad is looking down from heaven, nervous as anything so that you and I remain calm. You both always made me feel loved unconditionally and made me believe that anything is possible, that respect for everyone is not an option, that our faith supported all, and that failure was going to occur but how I responded, how I moved forward, is most important. You also encouraged me to take risks and venture to the unknown, confident that it would enable me to forge my own

unique path. Now, I am not sure you envisioned those risks to include me hanging on a yard arm with a one-inch cable under my feet suspended 120 feet above a swaying deck out in a stormy ocean, but it all worked out just fine, wouldn't you agree? Yes, you told me from an early age to go set the world on fire.

It has been five and a half months since I was first introduced to this wonderful Loyola University Chicago community as the 24th president, and 96 days since my official first day as your president. But who is counting? During this time, I have had the pleasure of meeting and speaking to literally thousands of people. Warm, passionate, dedicated, hopeful, proud, pragmatic, imaginative, attentive, supportive, enthusiastic, and mission-focused are just some of the words that can be used to describe our many interactions. I have stated often, only somewhat jokingly, that God has blessed me with two eyes, two ears, and one mouth—and I intended to use those in proportion. While I intend to continue abiding by those laws of proportionality going forward ... focusing on listening, observing, and being present, many of you have quickly learned that I also share information freely, seek data both quantitative and qualitative, and engage in discussion wherever and whenever possible.

I have heard much and learned even more and would like to use this occasion, which has brought us together, to share some reflections, information, perspectives, challenges, and ideas with you.

Cura personalis—we all know this means “the care of the individual person,” and it requires a respect for the dignity of each individual. It is something we readily embrace, discuss, and use as the foundation or reason for much of what we do. However, we speak far less openly and far less often of *cura apostolica*—care of the work, basically the need to care for the health and vitality of our organization. Yet, the two must coexist in a state of dynamic tension in order for us to truly adhere to our mandate as a Jesuit, Catholic university. We cannot have one without the other. This living in the middle, balancing two seemingly opposite positions, is something we face every day. As a university in the United States, we are currently facing much criticism while at the same time also being seen as the source of much hope. The value of a postsecondary degree is being challenged, and colleges and universities are being scrutinized for our ever-increasing tuitions used to support rapidly escalating costs. This business model, along with the use

of tuition discounting, is being attacked by those who have historically been strong supporters of higher education. Whether our students are being prepared to succeed in the global “real world,” student loan amounts that are strangling new graduates, access to education being limited to those who can afford it, a culture of tradition refusing to innovate ... fairly or unfairly, deserved or inaccurate, these types of criticisms are facing us every day and need to serve as a wake-up call to all of us. The ever-increasing threat of legislation and regulation to address many of these issues, piece by piece, is very real if we do not heed the warnings and demonstrate our willingness to make changes first. We need only look to health care to see how a constantly expanding regulatory environment has impacted that industry in a dramatic way with mixed results.

Yet, in the midst of the negative headlines, criticism, and demand for reforms, there is much hope, confidence, and expectation. Universities, especially research institutions such as Loyola, are seen by many as the source of new knowledge, the societal change agents that can be the catalysts for breaking the cycle of poverty through education, the best hope for righting our political and governmental systems by modeling civil discourse and respectful dialogue, the voice for social justice, which in our case as a Jesuit institution requires a commitment to the most vulnerable and marginalized, the drivers of economic growth and vitality, the source of breakthroughs in translational medical research with the ability to address the disparities in health care, the drivers of world-wide environmental sustainability, and more.

How can we do both—address the concerns about expenses and access while at the same time doing more to be the transformational change agents for our communities and the world? How can we live between the two extremes that, on the surface, seem at odds with each other? Can we possibly do it all? Should we do it all? Is it even rational to try? But if not us, then who? It is up to us to balance the requirements of careful stewardship with our mandate to change the world. Living with the dynamic tension between both extremes is absolutely in our Jesuit DNA makeup. It is exactly what we must do to live our mission, our calling. We must innovate to embrace not only the demands of *cura apostolica*, but also the expectations of *cura personalis*.

What began with Saint Ignatius of Loyola has recently been reinforced by Pope Francis. In his address to General Congregation 36 on October 24th, a meeting that had special significance in many ways, the Pope reminded those Jesuits in attendance that they must “go to the peripheries where others do not reach.” The Pope’s exhortation, by extension, applies to us. He did not choose to provide a specific direction or detailed guidance; rather he talked about the journey, a way of proceeding. It is, in fact, a call for us to reach further, dig deeper, and go beyond what is expected. It is about the *magis* and the journey to continually improve and expand upon everything we are doing. As heirs to a rich Ignatian tradition, it means that we cannot continue to do what we have always done and we cannot settle for the status quo.

Our strategic plan, Plan 2020, is a reflective, living document that provides us with the foundation to blend our teaching, research, and service. It is about us being and acting as one university. Bringing together into one collective effort our thirteen colleges, schools, and institutes for one mission as a transformative academic, cultural, and spiritual force. To achieve what our plan envisions and beyond, to go where we must go, to go to the peripheries, we will need to embrace the *magis* and make some changes to the way we may have always done things, reject the status quo and, together, carefully discern difficult choices ahead. We are presently in a stable financial position with strong enrollments and community support. This enviable position enables us to do what we must do, implement changes in a thoughtful but deliberate manner to reach our greatest potential as a leader among universities.

So... What do we need to do on Monday morning to ensure that we are able to go to the peripheries? What adjustments do we need to make to our present course to ensure our foundation for growth is secure and strong? Let us start with the “work.” Many of you have heard me discuss tuition rates beginning in the search process through more recent conversations, but it bears repeating: We cannot continue to rely on raising tuition rates as the principal source of funding our increases in expenses. Over the past eight years, our expenses have continued to increase at a faster rate than revenue growth, and our unfunded student scholarships and financial aid has more than doubled to ensure that more students have access to a great education. However, continuing on the current trajectory without making significant changes will result in our expenses

exceeding our revenue before this current freshman class graduates. From a practical perspective, we need to have surplus revenue funds each year to fund operations, pay debt incurred by the construction of our beautiful facilities and research center, and support growth in salaries and programs. We have a sustainable strategy to address this challenge both in the short term and the longer term. Diversifying and growing revenue through external fundraising, advancement activities including endowment campaigns, partnerships, and funded research and grants are all part of our long-range goal to reduce our dependence on tuition as the primary means of supporting our work.

However, as I have discussed with so many of you during these first few months, it will take several years to achieve the needed results from these efforts.

Doubling our endowment, engaging our alumni and community supporters in new ways, and supporting the research efforts of our existing faculty while at the same time attracting new research opportunities and faculty are very achievable goals. While we continue to implement these long-term strategies, we have more immediate work to commence. It is that work, some of which has already begun, but all of which we must focus on in earnest on Monday morning. Supported by a transparent and inclusive budget process, all of us will evaluate our expenditures, our business processes, and our programs to find the equilibrium we must achieve. This is not about doing more with less—it is about doing things differently and positioning all of our resources, both financial and human, to support the highest mission-critical work.

“Plan 2020: Building a More Just, Humane, and Sustainable World,” contemplated our need as a university community to embark on a journey and travel to the peripheries, even before the Pope reinforced that charge given by Saint Ignatius and others who followed in his footsteps throughout the years. In the two years since Plan 2020 was adopted, we have implemented many new, far-reaching initiatives including our work with Arrupe College, health disparities, and environmental sustainability. We continue to work to transition these programs from start-up projects to long-term sustainable programs that are seen as models and best practices for others. We have begun new academic programs and have reshaped long-standing degree offerings to better meet the needs of our students. We continue to receive proposals for new academic and support programs embracing the opportunities for growth and innovation.

In keeping with our strategic plan, and as a practical means to commence new efforts, we have recently created an innovation fund specifically designed to provide initial support for many of the ideas coming from all of you. The range of new ideas coming forth are varied in numerous ways including process reengineering, technology initiatives, graduate education, certificates, or other programs all envisioned as possibilities in Plan 2020. We will be launching several of these projects in the next 12-18 months. As with anything new, be it innovative ideas or incubator centers for testing new creative initiatives, when you push the boundaries of possibility, when you travel to the periphery, there is risk, and we will experience both wild success and abject failure. Everything we do provides us with an opportunity to increase our knowledge and grow, so we cannot be afraid of embracing the unknown, daring to dream, taking on some risk, and engaging our creative energies. Developing objective assessments, goals, and accountability for outcomes will keep us on the right path and enable us to learn from each other.

Our focus on Monday morning, however, is not just about the work—it is also equally focused on the whole person, the individual person. It is about continually living in the middle within the dynamic tensions generated by all that we must achieve as a university community. One of the most important elements of the solid foundation on which we must build our future, and an underlying requirement throughout the four institutional priorities of Plan 2020, is a deliberate focus on enhancing our diversity as a university community. Our need to embrace diversity in all of its forms is not just important to us as a Jesuit, Catholic educational institution in service to others, it is expected of us by our students and required of us by our society, not just in our Chicagoland communities, but by our country and the world.

There has been much deliberate action over the last several years to enhance diversity on our campuses. Ongoing recruitment efforts and training to assist all of us to more effectively attract diverse students, faculty, and staff to Loyola have helped us to improve and better reflect the world in which we serve. However, while we have measurable growth in diversity recruitment in all areas and vow to do more, we continue to struggle with retaining our students, faculty, and staff of color.

Student access and success, priority No. 1 in Plan 2020, has received much attention and resources since the inception of the plan. We have already seen some measurable improvement in the aggregate in retention from freshman to sophomore years and in six-year graduation rates. Delving deeper into the data, we have realized growth in our recruitment of African American and Hispanic students and achieved solid retention results between the first and second years of over 79% and 78%, respectively. We still need to focus on greater improvement, but the outcome trends are encouraging, highlighting the work that is being done across academic and student support areas. However, the news is not all positive. We are struggling significantly with retaining these same African American and Hispanic students through graduation with the most recent data for six-year graduation rates hovering around 50% and 68%, respectively. We must have a sense of urgency in understanding the reasons for these alarming results and persevere in our work to turn these results around and support all of our students on a path to successful degree completion.

We must be open as a community to comprehend the dynamics behind all of the challenges we face in embracing our diversity. We must also commit ourselves to work tirelessly so we are regarded as a supportive community, a welcoming community where all of us are willing to carefully and critically examine our own perspectives along with biases, and where all of us are willing to change. It will be through our diversity that we will be able to achieve unity. It is the unity, not uniformity, that we must have as a foundation to embrace all of our work, serve God's people, and journey to the periphery.

Standing before you today and every day, I am confident that unified together we will find ways to not only meet the high expectations we have for ourselves but exceed those our community and our world have for us. Because if not us, then who? This Loyola community is passionate, hopeful, proud, pragmatic, imaginative, attentive, supportive, enthusiastic, and intensely focused on our Jesuit, Catholic mission. We are, at the core, a collection of individuals sharing a common bond and journey. Through our coming together as one, we create that "something special," "something unique" that is powerful and symbolizes Loyola University Chicago.

Pedro Arrupe, a well-known former superior general of the Society of Jesus, made what is now a frequently quoted address in 1973 to alumni of Jesuit schools in which, quite bluntly, he aimed to put Jesuit education back on track. His inspiring words should still resonate with us today on our journey. He said in part, "All of us would like to be good to others, and most of us would be good in a good world. What is difficult is to be good in an evil world, where the egotism of others and the egotism built into the institutions of society attack us.... Evil is overcome only by good, egoism by generosity. It is thus that we must sow justice in our world, substituting love for self interest as the driving force of society."

Arrupe often challenged us to love from our very core in order to see God in all things while exhorting us to be true to ourselves. We need to be who we are so that we are able to live a life of meaning and purpose.

As I close my remarks this afternoon, I want to share with you a prayer, also from Pedro Arrupe, titled *Fall in Love*. I was familiar with this prayer prior to coming to Loyola but had not thought about it for some time. During my first week here, Sister Jean sent me a note in that special Sister Jean way, with a copy of the prayer set in a simple black frame. That prayer sits between the computer and phone in my office, and each day I take a moment to read it and reflect upon it. I want to share it with you now and hope you will also find it to be both comforting and inspirational.

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love
in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will effect everything.
It will decide what you do when you get out of bed in the morning, what you do
with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you
know, what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.

So now... Loyola University Chicago community... Go! Set the world on fire!