



UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

Inaugural Address Thomas W. Keefe, J.D. September 10, 2010

Bishop Farrell, Bishop Vann, members of the Board of Trustees, honored guests, faculty, staff and students, parents, members of my family, and the entire University of Dallas community, greetings. Thank you all for being here. I am honored and excited to be inaugurated as the 8th president of the University of Dallas.

Over the past few months, I have taken the opportunity to share my plans for the University of Dallas in a number of different venues; the plans include embracing our Catholic identity and fidelity to the Church, embracing the academic rigor of our Core curriculum, and our focus on Western civilization. But today I want to talk about my vision for the University of Dallas. My vision is that we commit ourselves over the next 5 years to truly being recognized as *the* distinguished Catholic liberal arts university in the nation. This is not an original idea. In 1956 one of the founders of the University, Eugene Constantin, charged us that we not settle for being just another small Catholic College, he asked that we not settle for anything less than becoming a distinguished Catholic liberal arts university. My request is that we take to heart the challenge of Mr. Constantin and commit ourselves to the mission of being recognized as *the* distinguished Catholic liberal arts university in this country.

I want to talk about why it is important for us to be a quality liberal arts university and about why a liberal arts education is important. A quality, rigorous liberal arts education is becoming rarer and rarer in the 21st century, as the vocational, pragmatic, job-oriented approach to education becomes more and more pervasive. I believe that a liberal arts education is integral to humanity and human culture and it is vitally important to the survival and flourishing of American and Western civilization.

Before we get into what the value of a liberal arts education is, I want to talk a little about the etymology of those words. The word "liberal" comes from the Latin word *liberalis* which means "befitting a free man" (*liberalis* comes from *liber*, which means freedom). "Art" comes from *ars*, which means art, of course, but in Latin the word can also mean "skill" or

"craft." So, a liberal arts education is the skill, the craft, or the art of being a free person and citizen. And truly, the highest aspiration of a liberal education is the transformation of students into virtuous individuals and responsible citizens.

C.S. Lewis once said that a liberal arts education transforms a student from "an unregenerate little bundle of appetites" into "the good person and the good citizen" (from Lewis' essay "Our English Syllabus"). One of the things that differentiate humankind from animals is that we are rational. Our freedom comes from our ability to reason. A liberal arts education, through careful contemplation and discussion of works of philosophy, literature, history, and theology cultivates rational self-rule and freedom from the tyranny of our appetites. This makes us better people and better citizens. Many of our political institutions are based on our ability to reason and not give in completely to our appetites—a free enterprise economy, the right to free speech and freedom of religion. All of our rights are predicated upon our ability to reason and to restrain our passions and appetites in the service of reason and principle.

A liberal education is directed at educating people to be citizens. The art and craft of being a citizen is to cultivate dispassionate, intelligent discourse as opposed to the shrill, angry shouting that we often see occurring between people trying to influence this country. You study logic. Use it. You study rhetoric. Use it. You study Western civilization to emulate Pericles, Cicero, Constantine, Thomas a' Becket, Thomas More, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, all inspired leaders who through very difficult times did not debase themselves or their country.

You cultivate dispassionate discourse through an impartial commitment to the search for truth. Pope John Paul II says in *Ex Corde* that Catholic universities because they are Catholic are, and I quote, "more capable of conducting an impartial search for truth, a search that is neither subordinated to nor conditioned by particular interests of any kind" (Introduction, Paragraph 7).

We are no less passionate or dedicated to our causes or principles as liberally educated people, but at the same time we understand that persuasion is an art that combines the best of a liberal arts education and ought to be used in the pursuit of justice and only in order to convince people of the truth. We cultivate discourse so that we can protect our intellectual freedom, and the institutions of free life. We understand that no person has the whole truth, and so we must be humble and objective in our conversation.

The impartial search for truth brings the relationship between faith and reason to light and meaning. Pope John Paul II called Catholic universities "to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavor of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God" (*Ex corde*, Introduction, Paragraph 5).

Besides producing good people and citizens, a liberal arts education offers us the chance to participate in the greatest traditions of Western civilization and to help preserve what is best in culture, what is in danger of dying out. People have lost any kind of communal knowledge of the classics. According to Pope John Paul II, something even more fundamental than culture is dying out, the present age is in danger of forgetting the

meaning of truth. In *Ex corde* he wrote, "The present age is in need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of proclaiming the meaning of truth, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished" (Introduction, Paragraph 4).

Value of OUR liberal arts education

The University of Dallas provides a liberal arts education which is valuable for all the reasons that I have already enumerated, but it has its own unique, inherent beauty and synergy—the Core curriculum, our enthusiastic Catholicism, the Rome program, and our commitment to the study of Western Civilization all combine into a unique educational and formative experience.

A university is by definition a collection of two or more colleges. The University of Dallas is fortunate to have a combination of 4 excellent academic colleges. We believe that an education at the University of Dallas prepares one not to hide from the world, but to go out in to the world as citizens and leaders. In keeping with this responsibility the University provides graduate training to committed, intelligent students of all ages, faiths, and races in different fields. The Constantin College for undergraduates is the original seed from which this plant has flourished. The Braniff Graduate School is the natural extension of that effort, allowing talented, committed students the opportunity to continue studying the liberal arts. The Braniff Graduate School prepares tenure-track professors and establishes a legacy through which the principles of a liberal arts education can be preserved in higher education.

The School of Ministry lives out our mandate to support the essential work of the Church in an area where the number of Catholics is growing exponentially and the call for lay ministers cannot be ignored.

We are proud of the College of Business and the Graduate School of Management; these schools provide the education which prepares the future business leaders of America. The College of Business and GSM are committed to fulfilling the call of Pope John Paul II to provide an education that emphasizes "the priority of the ethical over the technical and of the primacy of persons over things." (*Ex Corde*, Part One, Paragraph 18) One of the great assets of the college is the combination of the Core with the opportunity for students to prepare for life in 21st century America through a quality education in business with an emphasis on ethics built on its foundation of our Catholic mission, vision and values. The College of Business is a manifestation of the University's duty to provide the world with ethical, educated leaders.

All of the university's undergraduates are required to complete the Core. Our Core curriculum presents an ordered study of Western civilization. One moves through history in a way that gives students the opportunity to look at the whole continuum of Western civilization. You take Philosophy of Man, for example, to ponder the relationship between the different parts of the human being—the soul and body, the mind, spirit, and heart—and you explore the history of human thought on the matter in such a way that students see how the great conversations about each of these things have unfolded. Individual

works have value in and of themselves as well. You read the *Iliad* because through that poem you ponder the difference between what is fated by the gods and what man can accomplish for himself. You read the *Divine Comedy* to contemplate the vices and virtues of humanity in the different heavenly realms and how the entire universe is moved by love and desire.

The Rome program brings the Core's enduring conversation alive by offering students the chance to actually see the places and the works of art that figure so prominently into their studies. Aeschylus' great tragedy the *Eumenides* begins at Delphi at the Castalian Spring. Students read those lines of Aeschylus next to the Castalian Spring on the Greece trip. They talk about St. Paul while sitting on Mars Hill. This experience brings all of the work in the Core classes to life in a way that traditional study abroad programs, which don't require a specific curriculum of study, cannot and do not.

Mandate and obligation to lead

It has been suggested that a liberal arts education is an ivory tower existence. I couldn't disagree more. A successful liberal arts education requires a dedicated, successful individual who does not seek to run away from society's challenges. It requires an individual who has a confidence in his or her ability to lead. It requires an individual who won't shy away from discussion, but who will take a firm, positive position, and be knowledgeable, persuasive, and logical, not angrily covering a lack of information and ability with half truths and emotional attacks.

The University of Dallas is not a bubble. It is not a place for one to hide from the world, it is a place for one to prepare students (or be prepared) for the responsibilities of citizenship and leadership. As graduates, alumni, students, faculty, and co-participants in the University of Dallas we have a mandate and an obligation to lead. We have a mandate and an obligation to transmit the heritage and values of Western civilization and to contribute to it ourselves through conversation, writing, teaching, and (yes) leadership.

Lest you think I am suggesting that we haven't achieved Eugene Constantine's vision, in point of fact the University of Dallas is a distinguished Catholic university, one of the finest in the country. We were the youngest university to be granted a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in the 20th century. We have the highest per capita of National Merit Scholars in a Catholic university in the nation, with 48 National Merit Finalists enrolled at the University. We have exceptionally high professional school entrance rates—90% of pre-law track students are accepted to law school. The national average is 60%. 85% of pre-med track students are accepted to medical school. That is more than twice the national average of 40%. 100% of our education majors pass the Texas Teacher Certification exam. All nine of our 2010 Ph.D. graduates from the Braniff Graduate School have teaching positions, six of them have tenure-track teaching positions. We have achieved a great deal to be proud of, but we can build further upon this tremendous foundation.