



PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

“THE SPIRIT OF CREIGHTON: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW”

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24th President of Creighton University

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I appreciate the confidence the Board of Directors has shown in selecting me to serve as Creighton University's 24th president, and I accept this responsibility with gratitude and humility. I do so in the warm embrace of my family, Brother Jesuits, colleagues and friends with whom God has blessed me.

I welcome all of you who have come from near and far for our inaugural events. To my family – and, yes, there are quite a few of us – thank you for coming. The Lannons can absolutely spot a great time, no matter how far they have to travel! I love you all.

It is a distinct honor for me to be “coming home” to my alma mater. But I must tell you, it comes with a price. Knowing many of you from my days as a student at Creighton has smoothed my transition, and it is a pleasure getting reacquainted. The downside is that many of you recall a younger version of me! As one colleague commented, “I remember you when you had only dark hair.” And, yes, there is another downside: Some of you have stories about me from our college days. Remember, I have stories, too!

To all of you who have shared your congratulations and your encouragement here today, I am deeply grateful. I will take your words to heart and act upon them during my tenure as president.

To my good friends who join us today, I thank you for your presence and for the lifelong friendships we developed in Mason City, Iowa, here at Creighton, Marquette High, Creighton Prep, Harvard, and Marquette University – I am grateful for our friendship and your support. To my friends from Saint Joseph’s University, I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me. Being with you these past eight years has made me a better priest and leader. That famous Saint Joe’s motto, “The Hawk Will Never Die!” will always be present in my heart, except when we play you in athletics!

I appreciate the elected officials, presidents and delegates from other colleges and universities, and the Archdiocese of Omaha representatives who are here with us. I particularly want to recognize and thank Archbishop George Lucas for his support and presence. I am committed to continuing the strong and positive relationship between the Archdiocese and Creighton University. I am especially grateful that Father Charlie Currie is here today. Charlie served the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities as our president the past 14 years and he did so with great distinction!

I want to acknowledge Father Tom Lawler, the provincial of the Wisconsin province of the Society of Jesus. Tom and his predecessor, Father Tom Krettek, made me available for the presidency of Creighton. So, if you like what I do here, thank Father Lawler; if not, blame me!

To the administration and staff, I am grateful for your untiring commitment to our students and to the mission of this University. To the faculty, who foster the academic excellence that is the core of our enterprise, I thank you on behalf of the generations who have benefited from your wisdom, knowledge and guidance.

And to our students, the lifeblood of this university, whose hearts and minds are so open to us, I am humbled by your unfailing enthusiasm and hopeful that a little of it rubs off on me!

I am delighted that *ALL* of you could be here for this Inaugural Ceremony. We gather today to acknowledge and pay tribute to something greater and more enduring than a presidency. We celebrate the Spirit of Creighton – a Spirit that has been present throughout the 133-year history of this great institution and continues to guide and direct our actions today.

This Spirit was first manifested by St. Ignatius of Loyola nearly 500 years ago. Out of his experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* and his remarkable leadership, grew the Jesuit vision of higher education, which called for universities to be places of discernment, faith and wisdom and catalysts for truth, justice and service to those in need.

When I think of the Creighton and Wareham families, our many other generous benefactors, Creighton’s Jesuits, faculty, administrators, staff, students, and alumni/alumnae, I am struck by the unseen Spirit that has guided this University, faithfully and purposefully through the years. This Spirit encouraged so many to believe in a loving God and in the transformative power of education – and we are forever grateful to them.

This Spirit is so evident in many of the presidents who have led Creighton – Father Michael Dowling at the turn of the 20th century; Fathers Carl Reinert, Henry Linn, Joseph Labaj, Michael Morrison and others in more modern times.

Speaking of Father Labaj, he did not scare me when I was the student body president at Creighton. However, in my third year in the Jesuits he became the provincial. He scared me then! In my first meeting with him as a young Jesuit, he said to me: “You are too *effusio ad exteriora*. What do you think about that?” I told him that if he could tell me what it means in English, I could answer his question!

Many other dedicated leaders, including administrators and members of our Board of Directors, and great faculty and staff, to whom we all are indebted, have responded to the Spirit of Creighton throughout the decades. Names such as Boyne, Begley, Cahill, Casper, Deglman and Decker, Kelley, Lieben, McGloin, Renard, Schleich, Schlesinger, and most recently, Wiseman and Braden, to name only a few, come to mind. And who could forget our beloved Irma Trumbauer, who devoted 39 years of her life to Creighton students – and our stomachs!

I am so happy and grateful that one person who truly manifested the Spirit of Creighton is with us today: my predecessor, the 23rd president of Creighton, John P. Schlegel of the Society of Jesus. Father Schlegel deserves to be recognized for his visionary leadership and for transforming this campus.

Through the grace of God, the Spirit of Creighton enabled these individuals and countless other Jesuits, faculty, staff, Board members and students to lead this University, so that today Creighton has reached heights never imagined.

We are blessed with exceptionally bright students who are ready and willing to grow and change; record-breaking enrollments; national recognitions for excellence; talented faculty renowned for research including life-saving discoveries; and thousands of alumni/alumnae all across the United States and the globe who are open to God and are helping to create a more just world.

You and I are here today because we have experienced the Spirit of Creighton in our own lives.

My family was touched by the Spirit of Creighton. My father, James Woodward Lannon, was a 1936 graduate of the School of Medicine. While I am certainly proud of that fact, it was another accomplishment of his that often created the most curiosity among family and friends. He was one of those rare individuals who attended Creighton on a football scholarship! Let me show you something that belonged to my dad . . . his Creighton letter sweater!

My mother, Nora Eileen Ryan, graduated in 1931 from St. John's high school – which was located on this very spot on which we stand today. As with many Creighton families, my mother and father met while my father was a student here and went on to raise a large family and take active roles in their church and community.

I certainly was influenced by the Spirit of Creighton when I was a student here. I discovered leadership skills and inner strength that I did not know I had, and more importantly, my vocation to the priesthood began and was strengthened at Creighton. I was ordained in 1986 at St. John's Church on this campus.

Being a priest is central to my belief in the role of a president in promoting the Catholic and Jesuit identity of a university. I would not be here – *I would not be a Jesuit* – if it were not for the Spirit of Creighton.

Let me briefly explore the many manifestations of this Spirit.

Since the very first students walked through the doors of the one and only building that was Creighton, a Spirit of Generosity and Inclusion has made providing access to all talented students an important aspect of the University's educational mission. Last year, our undergraduate, graduate and professional students received nearly \$85 million in grant and scholarship support. Of that, Creighton provided almost \$70 million, and we are committed to raising the funds necessary to continue to provide the assistance our students need. We must arrive at that day when every qualified student can attain a Creighton education and not be overly burdened with debt.

One-quarter of the members of this year's freshman class are the first in their families to attend college and a similar percentage are students of color. In the best of our Catholic, Jesuit tradition, Creighton has always existed for students and patients from all faith traditions and walks of life – and we will continue to do so.

We truly have the most generous and involved students. They take community service to a new level, giving hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours each year, and are dedicated not only to their studies but to so many worthy extracurricular organizations and causes. And how about our men's soccer team – ranked No. 2 in the country in the national soccer coaches poll! They battle No. 3 Maryland tonight and we wish them well.

From its earliest days, Creighton's Spirit of Healing has inspired superb and compassionate patient care while preparing health care professionals to dedicate themselves to enhancing their patients' lives. Creighton's health care units make caring for the underserved a priority, last year providing more than \$47 million in charity care.

The changing face of health care in America confronts us with many challenges. Fortunately, we have an extraordinarily talented group of physicians, leaders, Board members and advisors who are imbued with Creighton's Spirit of Healing and are committed to continuing to provide quality patient care and medical education for years to come. The Creighton University School of Medicine has provided excellent, compassionate and ethical medical education for more than a hundred years and will continue its legacy for at least a hundred more.

As we face the complex issues confronting all of higher education – economic, demographic and competitive challenges – we remember that the Spirit of Creighton possessed by the resourceful women and men of Creighton is also a Spirit of Resilience. This spirit has enabled Creighton to survive wars and economic disasters, to stay strong in good times and bad.

We will rely upon this Spirit of Resilience – and our dreams for Creighton – as all of us together continue to move this great University forward. I am confident that the Spirit of Creighton will prevail and guide us as we engage society as a model 21st century Catholic and Jesuit university.

The Spirit of Creighton is a Spirit of Collaboration. This hallmark of Creighton's identity may be what struck me the most upon my return.

- Here in Omaha, Creighton has never been more involved with the business community and local nonprofit organizations, who look to us for expertise in business leadership and ethics.
- Among our own colleges and schools, there has never been the degree of interdisciplinary collaboration that is taking place today. We are a diverse learning community, a complex institution with nine colleges and schools, but we are realizing that we are strongest when we are ONE CREIGHTON, united with a common purpose. The possibilities are limitless when we work together.

- We have important ties and relationships with global entities. From our longstanding collaboration with the Institute for Latin American Concern in the Dominican Republic to our exchange and affiliate programs in 55 countries, the Spirit of Creighton has spread far beyond the corner of 24th and California streets.
- We have partnered with the greater Church and particularly the Archdiocese of Omaha in truly inspirational ways: The Magis Catholic Teacher Corps, the Center for Catholic Thought, and our Online Ministries program, through which thousands of people worldwide learn about Ignatian spirituality. These partnerships and so many more demonstrate our desire to be of service to all of humankind.
- Creighton has always been a gateway to Omaha for students who come here for college or professional school and decide to stay and contribute to the social, professional and religious fabric of this great community. We will rely on this Spirit of Collaboration as we take a greater role in correcting the inequities we find in our own city. We will trust this Spirit of Collaboration as we strengthen our partnerships with our neighbors and throughout the city, and seek to be a unifying force for good, a bridge that brings hope and healing, a bridge that brings a world class education to the youth of Omaha.

As we look to the future, our hopes and our dreams for Creighton ordain that we build upon the University's tremendous momentum. Now that our campus infrastructure has been transformed, it is time to invest even more in our academic programs, our educational mission.

Just as our founders labored to install the telegraph lines that stretched across cities, prairies and mountains, uniting our country from coast to coast, let us dedicate ourselves to making Creighton known as the place where the East and West Coasts meet, where students from around the world come together in mutual understanding – to learn, to grow and to reach their God-given potential.

The new superior general of the Society of Jesus, Father Adolfo Nicolás, has said, “Jesuit education should change us and our students. There is no real, deep encounter that doesn’t alter us.”

We know that it is our faculty and staff who bring Creighton’s Catholic, Jesuit mission to life for our students and provide the life-changing encounters of which Father Nicolás speaks. That is why it must be our legacy to support and enhance the research and scholarly work that is the heart of our educational mission.

To that end, I am pleased to announce the President’s Faculty Research Fund, which will support creation of knowledge in all its forms across the whole University.

Our mission states: “Creighton faculty members conduct research to enhance teaching, to contribute to the betterment of society, and to discover new knowledge.” The President’s Faculty Research Fund speaks directly to our mission and will solidify our track record of educational leadership across disciplines.

The President’s Faculty Research Fund is immediately available for proposals from full-time faculty. The research fund will place emphasis on:

- New investigators or new directions for established faculty;
- The scholarship of teaching and learning;
- And interdisciplinary team-focused projects that cross two or more schools or colleges.

I am excited about the untold benefits this research fund promises. I am grateful to our benefactors who have invested in this initiative and I look for others to follow their lead.

The Spirit of Creighton has positioned us well. There is no university in the country like us. We are unique because of our size, our array of professional and graduate programs, and our strong commitment to Catholic and Jesuit values and ideals at all levels of the University.

We now have the opportunity to be the very best at what we do and become known for *what we truly are*: A great *national* university that offers students unparalleled learning opportunities in an environment that challenges them to enter into dialogue with God, the world and themselves. We are indeed a great university, but the Spirit of Creighton, the Spirit of St. Ignatius calls us to become *an even greater university*.

Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the former general of the Jesuits, wisely said, “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become.” In other words, our focus must not be on *what* they become, but *whom* they become. I can think of no greater mission, no greater responsibility – *and no greater privilege*.

Yes, there is indeed a Spirit of Creighton that makes this University a special place. Just as it did when I arrived as a freshman in 1969, Creighton welcomes eager but uncertain young people from diverse backgrounds to its campus. Then, with God's grace, the wisdom of centuries of Jesuit education, and the hard work of our dedicated faculty and staff, this Spirit of Creighton transforms our students into mature and confident women and men with and for others. Strengthened by their Creighton education and the friendships they have created, they are ready and able to make their mark in their chosen professions and communities while taking their places as lifelong members of the Creighton community.

In May of 1973, I received the Spirit of Creighton Award, and it remains my most cherished honor. Now, 38 years later, I am asking all of you to recommit even more vigorously to the Spirit of Creighton – a Spirit that has transformed all of us but more importantly is transforming our students.

I promise you that as I begin my journey in faith and humility, I will devote myself to preserving and growing this Spirit. Our past was built on that Spirit, our present is fueled by that Spirit, and our future will be assured by that Spirit.

Thank you again for being here today. May God continue to bless you, your loved ones, the mission – and the Spirit – of Creighton University.