

Convocation Remarks 2014

Good evening – students, parents, families, faculty and staff – and welcome to Bellarmine’s 25th annual Convocation! Tonight we welcome the Class of 2018 into the Bellarmine University family and officially launch the 2014-2015 academic year.

I am delighted that you and your families have chosen Bellarmine for your higher education, building the foundation for your future and for your life. The faculty, staff, and I embrace you as you join our vibrant community of learning – a community that I hope will enrich and nourish you, and that I am certain will itself be enriched by your particular gifts, talents and perspectives.

We look forward to getting to know each of you personally over the coming days – and that is something that is possible in our human-scale community. But for now, here are some things that we already know about you as the collective Class of 2018:

There are 673 of you.

And you come to us from 21 states and several countries.

You are fairly evenly divided geographically: Your class make-up includes 33% from out-of-state, 34% from the city of Louisville and 33% from the rest of the state of Kentucky.

Your average ACT score is 25, and your average GPA is 3.5.

A majority of you - 72 percent – will be living on campus, and one-third of your class will be involved in one of our learning communities, which connect two or more courses around a common theme to be taken by a cohort of students.

Whether you are in a learning community, living in a residence hall, or commuting to Bellarmine from the surrounding area, we will do our best to make you feel at home here. We are very good here at hospitality, welcoming you as you welcome new faces, ideas, perspectives, and values.

We begin that welcome today and intensify and accelerate it next week as you participate in one of the most engaging, personal and comprehensive orientation programs in the nation. Our Student Life staff and students have put together quite a variety of on-campus and off-campus activities that will help you get to know each other, your Freshman Focus instructors and other faculty, as well as learn more about campus programs and Bellarmine life and culture.

On Wednesday, you will accompany faculty and staff members in providing assistance to various non-profit agencies throughout the city of Louisville in our fourth annual “Knights in Action Day of Service.” In addition to helping you learn more about the

community, this annual practice will give you a good feel for our mission of service here at Bellarmine – and a good feeling about being a part of it. This is all part of what we believe is the purpose of our excellent liberal arts, values-based education – developing your gifts and interests for your own sake of course, but also developing them to put yourself in a position to help others, to serve others, and to make the world a better place.

And then, of course, it will be time to start your academic journey. In 2014, you have more academic options than ever at Bellarmine. Since 2005, when we launched Vision 2020, a plan of continuous improvement as the Premier Independent Catholic University in the South and the leading private university in the Commonwealth and region, we have added more than 20 new degree and certificate programs, including the Doctor of Nursing Practice and our first Ph.D., in Education and Social Change.

Our total number of schools and colleges within Bellarmine University now stands at seven with the recent addition of the School of Environmental Studies, which celebrated its first graduates this past May.

And I am very excited about our new Institute for Advanced Analytics, which welcomes its first cohort of master's students this semester.

Building upon our strong liberal-arts curriculum, the Institute for Advanced Analytics will allow us to prepare the next generation of leaders and decision-makers for a region and world where corporations, governments, educators and non-profits will thrive or perish based on their ability to understand and use so-called “Big Data.”

The Institute will offer new informatics and technology degrees at the undergraduate, graduate and continuing education levels and across disciplines in our existing schools, and you may very well be among the first students to enroll in one of these new classes.

You will also witness the groundbreaking and construction of a brand-new building that will eventually house the Institute – and will change the face of Bellarmine University.

This building, which we are calling Centro, will consist of a three-story new classroom and office building as well as a completely renovated Horrigan Hall, with dramatic atrium space connecting the two and leading out into the Quad. It will feature numerous engaging and high-tech spaces, and teaching and learning technology, designated for student-initiated collaboration and idea development.

Centro will also be the new home for the Rubel School of Business, Enrollment Management, the Career Development Center, Campus Ministry and several classrooms. We plan a groundbreaking ceremony in late Fall, with construction scheduled to begin before the first of the year.

This is a period of great growth and innovation for us, as we thoughtfully and strategically enhance our campus and our academic offerings in order to prepare our

graduates – you! – for fulfilling lives of leadership and service in the 21st century and beyond, ready to make a living – and a life worth living.

You may not know at this moment what you eventually will do to make a living – and that's OK – and in this era of rapidly changing technologies and economies, your eventual career might not even exist right now! But with your basic liberal arts education and professional study in a variety of programs, what you do to make a living will become clearer over the next four years.

And whatever you end up doing, you should be reassured that Bellarmine graduates are highly desired by local, national, and international employers. For example, 94% of undergraduates and graduates who earned degrees in 2013 were employed, or were pursuing a higher degree, or both, one year later.

Of course, I don't have to tell you about changes and advances in technology; I'm sure all of you have more information in your pockets or handbags right now than the entire library held when I was in college. And so our Institute for Advanced Analytics will not focus on individual technologies – as we know, those quickly become obsolete. Instead, we will, through the Institute, inspire students across every academic discipline to examine the world through the liberal-arts lens, and then employ critical-thinking skills to harness whatever technology exists at the time to create solutions to the pressing issues in the world around them.

The Institute is new, but the philosophy behind it reaches back to the beginning of this university. Because when you think about it, “analytics” is a sophisticated way to describe the process of making connections. And that is something that we have been doing at Bellarmine since its founding in 1950.

Just as the generations of students who have come before you, you will, over the next four years or so, experience myriad connections:

Connection to yourself, to the best within yourself.

Connections to each other. In the Jesuit tradition that formed Robert Bellarmine, a key goal is to develop “men and women for others – homines pro aliis. During your college experience, you will meet people who are very different from you – from different races, different backgrounds, different political bents. As you engage in authentic conversations with these people, you will learn that perhaps you aren't so different after all. You will meet people who will become your lifelong friends. You might even meet your future spouse!

Connections to your professors and to the knowledge you will discuss and discover. We may be growing, but we are also very mindful of maintaining the small and personal classes that are a hallmark of the Bellarmine experience, and which no doubt were one reason you chose this university. We have 24 new faculty hires this year alone, keeping our average student to faculty ratio at 12:1. Your professors will know your name. They will know whether you are in class or not. And they will

challenge you as you've perhaps never been challenged before – but they will also be there every day to support you as you rise to that challenge.

And, finally, connections to the world. I hope that during your time here, you will embrace the important idea that all of us, all living creatures, are connected, interconnected.

As you may know, Bellarmine University finds its Catholic Identity in the inclusive spirit of Thomas Merton. Merton was a Trappist monk at Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, whose archives are housed at Bellarmine's Thomas Merton Center, and you'll get to know more about him in the weeks ahead.

The Merton tradition involves a keen sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all life and to human solidarity across ethnic and social divisions. It is perhaps best expressed by Merton himself, who wrote in his *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* about the epiphany that he had right here in Louisville during a visit in 1958:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. ... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

Bellarmino University will mark the Centennial of Thomas Merton's birth with an outstanding year-long series of events beginning in November that will help us to assess the ongoing importance of Merton's work and the direction in which he pointed us. They will be announced later in the fall at a special event.

One of the things that makes Merton so accessible and so relevant today is his humanness. He never claimed to be perfect; he openly acknowledged his flaws and his struggles to find his way. And tonight, on the eve of your Bellarmine journey, I have a feeling that many of you sitting here can relate to what he wrote in his *Thoughts of Solitude*:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road ... I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Fear not, Class of 2018: We will not leave you to face your perils alone, either. We are here to guide you, to instruct you, to nurture and support you, as you find your way through the next four years of opportunity and discovery. Relish your time at Bellarmine; you will learn more about yourself, the world, and your place in the world, than you thought possible.

Speaking personally and for my faculty and staff colleagues, as well as the alumni of the University, we are very glad you've come to Bellarmine University. Even without a Bellarmine education – you've already made a brilliant decision.

Thank you, good luck, and Godspeed.