





The Inauguration Address of Thomas G. Kruczek

**THE FOURTEENTH PRESIDENT
OF NOTRE DAME COLLEGE**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2014

What a wonderful day! I am deeply touched and honored by all of your kind words. Thank you so very much.

Let me express my deepest gratitude to our Board of Trustee members, who work so generously and tirelessly to advance the College, and to our board chairman, Rich Garcia, whose leadership is so very valuable to Notre Dame.

I am immensely thankful to the Sisters of Notre Dame for their unfailing prayers, guidance and support. And a special thank you to Bishop Roger Gries for being here and celebrating this morning's Mass.

Dr. Ross, thank you for traveling all the way from south Florida to join us here today. I hope you are enjoying our brisk Ohio fall! Your kind remarks are particularly meaningful because of the immense respect I have for you. When I watched you in action on the Lynn University campus, I witnessed a shining example of an outstanding president. Thank you.

We are privileged to have with us the mayor of South Euclid, the honorable Georgine Welo, who has been such a wonderful friend to the Notre Dame community. Thank you, Mayor Welo. And a warm welcome to the mayor of Lyndhurst, the Honorable Joseph Cicero.

Thank you to the good friends and community supporters of Notre Dame College who have come to join us on this day of celebration. Thanks also to Leadership Cleveland, including my new classmates, for being here today.

Thank you to my friends, colleagues and delegates from the outstanding academic institutions and organizations represented here today. I am honored by your presence.

My personal gratitude goes to Notre Dame's previous president, Dr. Andrew Roth, for his countless contributions to our College.

Thank you to our staff, who work so diligently to keep the College running smoothly. A special thanks to the members of the inauguration committee, student choir and band who put so many hours into making this event so memorable.

Thank you to our faculty members, who work with such devotion to give Notre Dame students an outstanding education. I'm going to pause here, because they deserve more than just my thanks. Faculty, please rise. Students, I'd like you to look at your professors. They have studied for years, they work long hours in and out of the classroom and they do it because they care about you, and about getting you ready for a great future. So in honor of our faculty, would everyone please join me in a round of applause?

And our awesome students, I want you to know how much I appreciate you. You are the center of our school. I can't say this too often: Every student is our most important student.

It's an honor to have so many Notre Dame alumni celebrating with us today. Welcome back to campus! It's great to have you here.

I come now to my most treasured blessings, my family: my wife, Carrie, and our children, Christin, Allison, Tommy, Alexander and Jamie and my soon-to-be born grandson, Weston Joseph.

Here today is the world's best mother-in-law, my wife's lovely mother, Joan Sincic, born and bred in Cleveland. A special welcome to my brother, Jerry, and the man to whom I owe it all, my father Joseph Kruczek. I had so much more I wanted to say about you, but I couldn't do it without choking up. So I'm keeping it to a simple thank you, Dad.

And finally, my wonderful mother, Dorothy, who although she has passed from this Earth is here today in my heart. I love you, mom.

Today is a joyous celebration of Notre Dame College. I am honored and humbled to begin my service as the 14th president, and I pledge to give you my best, to build on the foundation and principles established by the Sisters of Notre Dame and the trustees, teachers, staff and students who have come before us.

I am reminded today of a prayer by Cardinal Newman, which reads in part, "God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me, which he has not committed to another. I have my mission—I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told in the next. I have a part in a great work. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons."

As president of Notre Dame College, I too am a link in a chain as is every single member of the Notre Dame family. Every link in that chain is important, and every link in that chain serves a purpose.

It is a chain that stretches across nearly a century, from the first Sisters, and binds us together today. While our campus has physically changed ... just try to imagine Sister Mary Agnes Bosche at one of our football games ... the spiritual mission, and the faith and love at the core of that mission, remains unchanged.

So although today marks my inauguration, today is not about me. It is about Notre Dame and all those who serve Our Lady's college. It is about each of us, and our part in this great work, as Notre Dame College continues to change the world one student at a time.

Today we celebrate our Notre Dame family.

Today we celebrate sacrifices for the greater good.

Today we celebrate a culture of caring.

Here, every student matters, and we are rightfully proud of our tradition of access and affordability. Christ's outstretched arms on the cross are the reminder that we too must embrace all of his children, and we do. And we do it with a caring heart. We reach out to help young men and women fulfill their dreams of a college education.

I witnessed an amazing example of outstretched arms this summer as I watched one of our students learning geometry in our Academic Support Center. Her instructor was using simple string and straws to help her successfully learn the concept of angles. Here's the amazing part: That student is blind.

Another element of our unique mission is to serve the underserved. When a student comes from a home where paying college tuition is out of reach, we try to fill that need. Policies and procedures don't dictate our actions, and when our students need help, our hearts are our guide. Just this summer,

one of our juniors tragically lost his mother, and in another school he might have also lost his college dreams, because without her financial support he couldn't afford school. But he still had his Notre Dame family, a team committed to his future. We cobbled together what he needed, so he will graduate. Another proud link in our chain of caring hearts, another link in our Notre Dame family.

We want our students to succeed, and we are always ready with an outstretched hand. We reach out before they even enroll. Navigating the college admissions process can be incredibly complicated.

I know, I have five children and have torn my hair out filling out FAFSA forms, and I'm pretty familiar with colleges! Imagine how overwhelming it can be for someone who is the first in their family to attend college. But here, we reach out and help our applicants through the admissions process. We give them that extra help to prepare them for college. We do everything we can to help every student succeed.

Here's a perfect example: Several weeks ago one of our recent graduates stopped by my office. He just wanted to say thank you for all that Notre Dame College had done for him. In his own words: "It changed my life. I never thought I'd be lucky enough to graduate from college. It was hard for me, and I did it. But only because of all the help I got. Everybody did everything they could to make sure that I made it across the stage at graduation. I could never have done it without them. It really changed my life."

That was wonderful to hear, but what he said next really wowed me: "I want to help other students. It made such a difference in my life; I want to help other students succeed in college." He came back to pay it forward. This young man is a shining example of the power of Notre Dame's circle of caring, and an amazing testament to the power of a Notre Dame education.

It takes time, and a heart for service, to go that extra mile, and it's worth all the work because we have wonderful, bright and hardworking students who will change the world. At the end of the day, the proud young men and women of Notre Dame College will leave our community, our country and our world better than they found it.

As long as I'm bragging about our students ... and I love to brag about our students ... a few weeks ago, I got an email from a hotel where our soccer team stayed for an away game. I was hesitant to read it. I used to coach youth travel hockey, and sports teams and nice hotels can be a bad combination! But here's what the general manager had to say:

"Every single member of your team conducted themselves professionally and with utmost respect toward the staff, as well as other guests. This is the first time we have ever had any group using our meeting room clean up thoroughly after themselves. Also, to our amazement, while waiting to get on the bus, the team wandered around the lot picking up debris and depositing it into waste receptacles. The staff are all still buzzing about it."

This could just as well have been a story about any of our teams or our band or any group of our students because this is so typical of the young men and women who attend Notre Dame College. And I am so proud! It was a small act that showed their underlying character. With attitudes like this, can't you just imagine the wonderful ways in which they will change the world!

It is our grave responsibility to ready them for that world and for the whirlwind of change that will be their future. Some of our graduates will have wonderful career opportunities in fields that exist this moment only in imagination. Some will enter fields like health care and education that, while traditional, are rapidly changing. But all of them will be entering a world of change.

They need a solid foundation, and that's exactly what Notre Dame's outstanding Catholic liberal arts education provides. In the tradition of Bernard Overberg, our education forms character as it feeds the mind. That's quite a combination! Our graduates will be service-minded young adults with the solid communication and critical thinking skills they need to succeed, no matter the direction they take in life. They will be able to adapt to the changes they will face.

To prepare them for success, we must adapt our educational model as well. It cannot be "change for the sake of change," nor those forbidden words "because that's the way we've always done it." We must

keep the best of the traditional liberal arts education but expand our experiential learning. We must be innovative in our approach and relevant in our curriculum.

We must give our students even more. In today's world, it's not enough to hand our young graduates a diploma and wish them good luck. We want them to have great jobs, wonderful careers, fulfilled lives, opportunities to make their dreams come true. To make that happen, we have to extend ourselves outward.

It is crucial that we forge links in the community. We will form that bond of connection between individuals, to help link our campus to the community and to get the message out that our students and our school are amazing. Because when that message gets out to business owners, corporate executives, community leaders and philanthropists, more good things will happen to Notre Dame College.

We will have classroom projects that involve local businesses and community organizations, our students will be offered great internships and we will have companies excited to hire our graduates. There will be gifts to improve our campus, more scholarships for deserving students and more dreams that will become reality.

So that our path forward is sure and true, we are proceeding with a strategic plan. It will be our vision for the future. We will keep the best of the past and discover the best of the future.

We will move nimbly and decisively. Our focus must be on driving innovation in all we do. We won't just think "outside the box" on considering new majors and programs. If necessary we will create an entirely new box. We must thoughtfully and carefully consider our core curriculum and make hard choices if needed. We must look outside the classroom and enhance wherever we meet and interact with our students.

We must improve what we do to make sure that it adds value for our students and prepares them for life after Notre Dame.

There is work to be done, but the spirit of innovation is alive here. And that will make all the difference. Let me repeat that: The spirit of innovation is alive here, and that will make all the difference. The future is bright for Notre Dame, and it will take teamwork and communication to make it happen. We are ready.

Doesn't this point in my speech just cry out for a great quotation, an exhortation to fire up our enthusiasm? A pearl of wisdom from someone like Winston Churchill or Margaret Thatcher? Well, I can do better than that. This is from one of our own nursing graduates, Dalisa Delk, class of 2013: "Have great expectations, and do what you have to do to reach them."

Don't you love that philosophy! "Have great expectations, and do what you have to do to reach them." I bet that would have made our founding Sisters smile because that is just what they did.

Great expectations are a tradition here because we are part of a great work. We help educate and shape young men and women who are trusting their futures to us, even as they will be the future of our world.

And when our graduates leave us and move out into the community, they will forge new links in the chain, they will build new connections that will enlarge our circle of caring and they will change the world. And through them we will have changed the world.

We are all connected, links in a chain of caring. The touch of our founding Sisters of Notre Dame is still felt across the years. What they began continues in us. It is a chain without end that reaches into our past and will continue beyond us and into the future. It is a circle of caring, and the heart of Notre Dame's mission. I am so honored to be a part of it.

Thank you.



