How fast the autumn fades into winter! In a few short weeks, fall colors give way to shorter days and chilly nights. The Christmas holidays, which evoke so many memories of family, are right around the corner. But before the memory of fall fades altogether, I invite you to think back to the three days in October that joined our annual Fall Family Weekend with the All-Class Alumni Reunion we called “Zagapalooza.” Rarely has Gonzaga’s campus come so close to overflowing with excitement as it did during these days. Such a celebration it was! We invited everyone, and to our great joy, nearly 5,000 of you joined us to commemorate Gonzaga’s 125th anniversary.

Such a celebration, at its heart, gives each one of us the chance to embrace dear friends, to relive treasured memories, and to celebrate the relationships we have with one another.

Such a celebration also gives us the opportunity to put faith at center stage. We dedicated the gracious new University Grotto, a sacred site that is made all the richer by dint of its history and those members of the Montana Club in the early 1950s who bent their youthful backs to build the original Lady of Fatima Shrine.

Such a celebration bursts with hope. Future Zags gave a blessing to all in a full-to-the-brim St. Al’s during Sunday Mass, and a standing-room-only McCarthey Athletic Center reverberated with pride during Kraziness in the Kennel.

Such a celebration attracts Zags from near and far. Near, we know well: California was far in Gonzaga’s early years, but is now near; Alaska, too. But in today’s internationalized world, we must recalibrate what we mean by far. The Gonzaga alumnus – that I know of – who traveled furthest for Zagapalooza was business alumnus Sam Molefe (’92) who with his wife arrived from Pretoria, South Africa, a journey of 10,000-plus miles.

Our celebration began a few days early with a campus visit from the extraordinary Sir Ken Robinson, whose advocacy for creativity and innovation in teaching and learning is known worldwide. As well, this year’s Distinguished Alumni Merit Awards banquet showcased just how deeply a Gonzaga education can shape a life when a once-overwhelmed freshman told of her arrival at GU. DAMA awardee Fawn Sharp is now president of the Quinault Indian Nation and a change agent for Native American peoples across the country.

Our celebration of Gonzaga’s tradition and transformation continues on Jan. 24, 2013, with National Gonzaga Day. We invite you all. This time, we are coming to you!

I close with heartfelt thanks to each of you who continue to make Gonzaga a space of learning and love, of excellence and relevance. May Christ’s peace bless you and your loved ones this Christmas season.