During my 25 years at Gonzaga, I’ve been privileged to learn from and work with so many individuals, including faculty, staff, and administrators, who have given a huge portion of their lives to the service of our Jesuit educational mission. Religious and lay, companions in the important work of teaching and learning, they received God’s gifts only to turn and share them generously with others. The only fitting response, particularly as we move into the holidays, is to express our gratitude to and for them – and to acknowledge the significance of their impact within the larger Gonzaga community.

Consider Bud Barnes, dean of our School of Business Administration for these past 33 years, who has poured his intellect, his determination, his consensus-building and vision into the faculty, students and graduates whom he cares for. The result is measured in thousands of students and colleagues who have gained professional and ethical direction in their lives, leadership skills and intellectual prowess. All this, plus a business school ranked among the best in the nation. Bud is stepping down from the dean’s chair at year’s end. The term “retirement” might be a bit premature, for Bud will continue his teaching and take on other projects. This is love for Gonzaga made incarnate.

Also Alice Bair, another colleague who has devoted so much to Gonzaga. Alice retired this fall in her 31st year of keeping our facilities in the best condition possible. She earned a reputation on our custodial team as a hard worker. But Alice did more. She brought her most valuable assets to campus each day: her smile and care for others. Day or night, amid the endless chores of custodial work, she connected with students. If she sensed that an individual might be overwhelmed, she reached out with support, and alerted someone to check further on that young person. For so many, Alice too has been a reflection of Christ at work in our world.

At a time when the media draws attention to national discord and dysfunction, how fortunate we are to sustain a community united in our Jesuit mission of preparing our students for lives of leadership and service. I have often said that Gonzaga is a small city – a city built upon the belief that caring for our students and for each other is an essential part of what it means to be a Zag. From our small city here, to all of you – students, parents and far-flung alumni, faculty and staff, custodians and deans – I send my gratitude, and my best Christmas wishes. May the peace of Christ be with you and your loved ones, now and always.