Thank you so much.
Mr. Luger, Father Lee, Bishop Cupich, Elder Pauline Flett, Father Kuder, Father Waters and Father Currie; Members of our Boards of Trustees and Regents, and the Board of Members; Vice Presidents and Deans; Faculty President Volbrecht and Staff Assembly President Ruff; Delegates and Presidents of nearly 50 higher education institutions; Distinguished Guests; My Wonderful Family – both those who are here, and those who cannot be; Faculty, Staff, and Administrative Colleagues; Parents, Alumni, and Most Especially, Our Students!

Thank you, and thank you for being here on this special day. Will you please join me in thanking our new Academic Vice President, Dr. Patricia Killen, for her tremendous service as our Master of Ceremonies. Today, most of all, we together celebrate Gonzaga University and the many remarkable achievements of those who make and have made Gonzaga the vibrant institution that it is. I want to take a moment to recognize in a special way two Jesuits who previously served this university as presidents, one of whom is not able to join us today, the other of whom is: Chancellor Bernard Coughlin, and Fr. Robert Spitzer. I want to thank you both for your leadership and your support.

I also want to thank our speaker, Sr. Kathleen Ross. Thank you for your eloquent words and for the challenges you lay before me and before our community. I am grateful to you for returning to your alma mater and being with us today.

My greatest thanks go to my wife, partner, and colleague Julie McCulloh and to our three daughters: Katie, Annie and Emily. Thank you for your love, your constant support, and your willingness to make this exciting journey a family project.

Recently, one of my three daughters took to asking a question every night at the dinner table: “What did you learn today, that you didn’t know yesterday?” This question frames perfectly where I wish to begin my brief remarks this afternoon. After twenty-three years of life lived on or close to this campus, I have learned some important things about Gonzaga and that knowledge informs my vision for this place.

One of the things I have learned and truly believe is that we are a community blessed both with the grace of the Holy Spirit and the generous goodwill of many talented people. What we are able and willing to do – be it students, or faculty, or staff, or supporters of this institution – when we put our minds to it, is simply remarkable. I have countless memories of large projects and major accomplishments that began as simple ideas, shared over coffee, and became reality because we allowed our imagination take us places we had not been, and because we are a place that can and does foster the creativity necessary to solve real problems.

Another thing that I know and that keeps me invested in Gonzaga, is that we are “a place becoming.” We do have challenges and places we fall short. We are not as far along as we need to be in some critical ways or key areas. Sometimes we too easily let ourselves off the hook for some things that we probably need to be quite firmly on the hook for. What is, however, redemptive about Gonzaga is that we recognize most of our challenges, and we are willing to work hard at tackling them. I’d much rather be part of a place that is still learning about itself than one that thinks it knows all of its own answers. To me, at least, “a place becoming” is a place worth investing in, worth being part of. I hope we never lose that sense of dynamic development.
Over the course of nearly 125 years, Gonzaga University has been committed to a specific primary mission: the educational preparation of the region’s people to become reflective human beings and productive contributors to society, whatever path they chose in the worlds of work and civic life. During the past quarter-century, the University has built upon this fundamental mission to become known as an increasingly selective institution that works hard at instilling in its students a deep sense of social responsibility and the value of community.

“The true measure of a Jesuit education,” said former Superior General Hans Peter Kolvenbach, “is not what our students do, but who they become.” As we daily work together to support and structure collegiate experiences of which not only our students, but of which we all can all be proud, we also find ourselves today deep in the process of discerning what it is that we need to do to help our students become their next best selves – not only for themselves, but for the planet and the people they will serve and govern in this century and the one beyond it. So the question now becomes, “What will you teach and learn today, that will best serve us all tomorrow?” And another question relates to the first: “how will you be teaching it and learning it?”

All that we teach and learn we do in the context of Gonzaga’s mission as an exemplar of what it means to be a Jesuit and Catholic university in the United States. I am deeply committed to emphasizing this essential character of the university. But what, in specific terms, does it mean to be Jesuit and Catholic? We have many sources upon which to draw; for example, in the Introduction to Ex Corde Ecclesiae, Pope John Paul II spoke to the “responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth . . . with the conviction that truth is its real ally, and that knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith.”

More recently, his Holiness Pope Benedict 16th spoke to these same issues in addressing the Jesuit General Congregation 35 on February 21, 2008: “As my predecessors have often told you, the Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach.” If being at the margins is constitutive of our call as a Jesuit, Catholic university, it becomes incumbent upon us to think through its educational program not only in terms of its traditions, but in light of the opportunities and challenges that confront society today; opportunities and challenges that are more complex than at any time in human history. We live on a planet that only ten years ago had one billion fewer people; the impact of consequential, mass-scale resource consumption, coupled with growing awareness of its impact on the environment, has created opportunities for solution-building of a kind never before imagined. The information age has generated tremendous opportunities for the development of new and amazing internet-based technologies; it has also brought a limitless set of new ethical and social challenges. In the face of increasing demand for energy, we need to find sources that enhance, rather than degrade the environment.

It is human nature, during chaotic and uncertain times, to seek refuge and comfort in the transitory and superficial. It is no wonder, then, that in addressing a recent gathering of presidents and representatives from all of the Jesuit colleges and universities worldwide, our Superior General Adolfo Nicolas enjoined us to seek a greater “depth of thought and imagination” with the aim of making our students “well-educated persons of solidarity” – solidarity with not only the mainstream movements of the culture, but solidarity with those at the margins, as well as those working at the frontiers of knowledge and understanding. It is in these spaces, wrestling with these issues, that real inroads towards both intellectual progress and spiritual development have an opportunity to gain a foothold.
What for me sets a Gonzaga education apart is a distinctively Jesuit intellectual endeavor to which we attach ourselves; one which demands that a rigorous academic experience be provided in concert with the cultivation of spiritually grounded, emotionally mature, and socially responsible habits of character that lend themselves well to cultural leadership.

In this time of tremendous societal challenge and change, I believe we must re-commit ourselves to preparing each of our graduates to assume active roles in engaging the critical issues of this period in history—through the dynamic creativity of our faculty, a faith-filled commitment to justice, and the goal of providing true and long-lasting contributions to a world in need of them.

Over twenty-three years, what I have come to know that I did not know when I began? I know that this is a community of students, faculty and staff who, in a variety of ways, are putting this institution on the national map, as a university that is truly both Jesuit and Catholic, one with the growing reputation for educating people who do indeed transform the world. The past decade of growth has been challenging for us in many ways. It also has allowed the university to complement an existing core of excellent faculty by attracting new intellectual talent from the nation’s finest universities and graduate programs. During this same period, we have become a national presence, annually drawing students from most states and many countries. As well, foundation support and a committed faculty have enabled Gonzaga to develop remarkable new opportunities for cutting-edge research and scholarship in the life and social sciences, engineering, the law, business, and education – indeed, everywhere.

In the contemporary parlance of the Society of Jesus, we are a university called to live and learn and teach and explore not comfortably at the center of the culture, but at the frontiers – the cutting edge, the margins, places that require courage. What our world needs today are educated people who can and will transform the world. This is what I have learned that I did not know, nor could have imagined, twenty-three years ago: By working together – students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and supporters – we can without question meet the challenges this need presents.

(Conclusion)
The word “inauguration” is from the Latin, “in-augur-atio” which essentially means, “to install or consecrate under favorable omens.” At their core, inaugurations are about hope; hope for a successful administration, a successful future, for a beneficial and successful venture. I think there is a particular relevance in this purpose for us today; for if there is one place in society where people can go, and should go, to draw from the wellspring that gives people reason to hope, or to renew their sense of hopefulness, it should be a college or university. But beyond this, the imperative to even greater good, finds its resonance in the reality that the inspiration of hope is an obligation for a Jesuit and Catholic university. We must be a source of hope. And in a particular way, we must be hope for all those who truly need us: our government, our organizations, our schools, our professions; the homeless, the poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized.

Today, I feel blessed to publicly acknowledge the call to serve as Gonzaga’s president; I am grateful for the opportunity to continue the work of supporting and collaborating with all of you in the common project of helping Gonzaga University understand the challenges of tomorrow, and meeting them successfully with excitement, and with passion for the mission we are so very blessed to be a part of.

**The call we have received is a call shared by us together.** To the Jesuits of Gonzaga University, my sincere gratitude for the education you have given me, and for your love and support throughout these past two decades. In the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola, “Let us work as if success
depended upon ourselves alone, but with heartfelt conviction that we are doing nothing, and God everything."

May God continue to bless us all, as together we voyage anew, and discover what wonderful future lies beyond the horizon. Thank you.