Greetings on this beautiful afternoon to the Distinguished persons on this platform, especially our wonderful new President Thayne McCulloh, to the Board of Trustees, the Regents, and the Board of Members; to Provincial Pat Lee, to Bishop Cupich, to the Outstanding Faculty of the University, the Administrators, and most especially to the Gonzaga Alumni, students and their parents on this special weekend.

As I stand before you in this huge center, my mind creates another image, one from 50 years ago when the largest space that GU students could gather in was the auditorium located at the east end of College Hall where the theater is today. I remember sitting up in those bleachers listening to the President’s challenge to stretch our minds, to think more broadly and profoundly than we thought we could. I must say the Gonzaga Honors Program certainly did that for me! My world expanded dramatically as I read original documents from 16th century Spanish explorers who colonized Mexico, and I researched through letters written by 17th century French Jesuits living with Native peoples in what is now Ontario. That kind of mind-stretching year is what I wish for every student here today.

Today is a day to look back at how much we have to celebrate, remembering all Gonzaga has accomplished as it has lived out its Jesuit and Catholic mission. But today is also a day to look forward with excitement and anticipation. Before our very eyes, the world is being transformed, and our Gonzaga mission calls on us to see that every student receives a transformational education. What does it all mean?

Picture our world, the beautiful blue-green globe. Let’s say you wanted to get your arms around it, in a traditional sense, and you decide to charter a plane. You fly an elliptical circle into the southern hemisphere before finishing the circle to get back here. You’re going to fly about 25,000 miles. Next, picture, after 20 hours of flight, that you stop half-way, perhaps in the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho in southern Africa. Although you’re exhausted after 20 hours of flight, you step off the plane momentarily while it refuels for the next 20 hours return flight. Meanwhile, here I am at the podium. If I want to talk to my African friend who lives in Lesotho, Sister Sylvia Jone – who incidentally is a GU graduate – I could text her on my Blackberry to find out what she’s having for her next meal – which will be breakfast for her -- and 5 minutes later I could get her answer. Before I’ve finished this speech, and without leaving this podium, I’ve had a more personal exchange with another human being on the other side of the planet, than you have had after 20 grueling hours of flight. Our view of the globe and people on it has certainly been dramatically altered. That’s the kind of transformation happening in our world.

What kind of education prepares students for that kind of physical and psychological transformation? What does “a transformational education” at a Catholic, Jesuit University really mean?

We might start by asking, “transform from what?” Well, we start with an enthusiastic gratitude for what each new student brings to Gonzaga -- amazing gifts of heart and mind. Gonzaga students are indeed ready for and deserve a transformational education. I like the description from Father Kolvenbach, Former Superior General of the Jesuits: “education for the ‘whole person’ . . . intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally and spiritually.” He says, “Tomorrow’s ‘whole person’ cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world. Tomorrow’s whole person must have, in brief, a
well-educated solidarity.” What a great phrase to describe “educational transformation” – “well-educated solidarity.”

Everything we do at this university – literally everything – should be orchestrated precisely to educate the whole person to be what Father Arrupe so profoundly named “a person for others,” well equipped to make a difference as a citizen of the world who helps shape the transformation of our entire world so that all may realize their full human dignity as God’s children and brothers and sisters of Christ himself.

One of the most important choices that define how transformational the education of the university really is, revolves around the choice of which students it serves. Who do we recruit and admit? Who do we build into communities of mutually-supportive learners? Who do we support all the way to graduation and beyond?

Think back on the beautiful blue-green globe. Who do our new students see forming their world, their globe as they enter Gonzaga? Who do we hope they see as forming their world when they graduate from Gonzaga? And how can we assure what they see embodies a wider multiplicity of peoples?

Think about what a profound influence their fellow students have on each student every day. After all, when you think about the 24 hours in a student’s day, who does the student have the most contact with – the faculty, the staff, or fellow students? So WHO you choose to compose the student body, and how you shape positive learning opportunities among students – these become essential elements of a transformational education.

Gonzaga has a wonderful commitment to diversity – to the “variety of human cultures” as the mission statement says, including ethnicity, gender, religion, gender orientation, age, socio-economic class. So it is great to hear that the new class just admitted to Gonzaga has almost 20% students from diverse ethnic cultures. Another relevant diversity in addition to ethnic diversity is socio-economic class, something we Americans are not very comfortable talking about. We don’t often recognize different socio-economic classes as having distinct “cultures,” and we don’t know much about building bridges across those cultures. But to arrive at “educated solidarity” our students need to learn with and from students from low-income families – families with incomes below $25,000 annually – students who have experienced very different daily challenges than most Gonzaga students. Many such students are also in the first generation of their families to seek a four-year degree. Students from these low-income and first-generation backgrounds represent a growing percentage of high school graduates across the country. Integrating them into excellent four-year college programs is essential if America is to have well-prepared leaders in all walks of life for the future. And middle class students from families with a college-going tradition will not fully come to a “well-educated solidarity” unless they learn with and build together learning communities which include students of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

I found it fascinating when I compared Gonzaga’s wonderful mission statement to Heritage’s. Gonzaga’s focuses entirely on the content and desired results of a Gonzaga education, while Heritage University’s mission statement has as its primary focus WHO is to be educated, before describing what the content of that education should be. As Dr. McCulloh leads the university to focus on how it is achieving its mission, might there be a desire to incorporate into its mission statement mention of WHO Gonzaga commits itself to serve as well as what the educational content will be?

I am not naïve about the significant financial implications that a diverse student body poses. It automatically raises questions about where to focus the resources of the institution. But it also
opens new doors of possibilities for faculty and staff. What kinds of interactions with and among students should you plan? How can you encourage students to work with each other across cultural and class barriers? Could you then find new communities outside the university where you could embed service learning and community involvement? What new and exciting opportunities for developing transformed students with a “well-educated solidarity!”

Gonzaga is beautifully positioned to respond to the transformation which is occurring in the world around us by continuing to produce “people for others.” As we rise to the call of President McCulloh to focus on what makes a transformational education, we can ask ourselves, “How do we need to transform ourselves so that all our students – as well as ourselves -- grow more fully into “well-educated solidarity?” What should be the focus of our resource planning and our fund-raising? What should be our priority projects and our research agenda to assure that every student experiences a transformational education?

President McCulloh, thank you for the honor of asking me to think out loud today about the mission and vision of Gonzaga University in an era of incredibly fast-moving change, the transformation of the world as we have known it. Gonzaga under your leadership is surely positioned to continue advancing a transformational Jesuit education. As you continue to graduate “people for others,” I say, “Thank God for all those Gonzaga graduates who will embody the ideal of a “well-educated solidarity!” And thank God for you, Thayne McCulloh, who are leading us into this exciting future! You are a blessing to all of us!