



Rev. John I. Jenkins

EDITORS' NOTE In July of 2005, Rev. John Jenkins became the 17th president of the University of Notre Dame and began a second five-year term in July 2010. He had previously served from 2000 through 2004 as Vice President and Associate Provost. A Notre Dame alumnus, Father Jenkins earned bachelor's and master's degrees in philosophy from the university in 1976 and 1978, respectively, and was ordained a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on campus in 1983. While earning bachelor's and doctoral degrees in philosophy from Oxford University in 1987 and 1989, respectively, he also taught in Notre Dame's London Undergraduate Program. He also earned a master of divinity degree and licentiate in sacred theology from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. A member of the Notre Dame philosophy faculty since 1990 and the recipient of a Lilly Teaching Fellowship from 1991 to 1992, Father Jenkins served as Director of the Old College program for Holy Cross seminarians from 1991 to 1993 and as Religious Superior of the Holy Cross priests and brothers at Notre Dame from 1997 to 2000. Father Jenkins is a recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. He also holds honorary degrees from Benedictine College, the University of San Francisco, and Aquinas College, and was the 2009 recipient of the American Irish Historical Society's Gold Medal. In 2010, he was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and in 2011, he was appointed to the academy's Commission on the Humanities & Social Sciences. He is a member of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities board of directors. The Commission on Presidential Debates elected Father Jenkins to its board of directors in 2011.

INSTITUTION BRIEF Founded in 1842 by a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the University of Notre Dame (www.nd.edu) is an

A Vision Worth “Fighting” For

An Interview with Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.,
President, University of Notre Dame, home of the “Fighting Irish”

independent, national Catholic research university located adjacent to the city of South Bend, Indiana. The university is organized into four undergraduate colleges, the School of Architecture, the Law School, the Graduate School, 14 major research institutes, two dozen centers and special programs, and the university library system. The Graduate School, established in 1918, encompasses 43 master's and 25 doctoral degree programs in and among 29 university departments and institutes. The source of the university's academic strength is its faculty, which since 1988 has seen the addition of some 500 new members and the establishment of more than 200 endowed professorships.

What goals has the university been focused on achieving?

Notre Dame's strength throughout its history has been undergraduate education. We will not diminish our commitment to the academic quality of instruction of our undergraduates and to their ethical and spiritual growth, which are distinctive aspects of a Notre Dame education.

In recent decades we have become a strong research university, contributing to society through inquiry and discovery. We've become stronger in that and we want to become even stronger.

These activities of teaching and discovery receive a distinctive orientation from our religious mission as a Catholic university. We believe this three-fold commitment – undergraduate education, research and graduate education, as well as a distinct religious mission – enable us to make an important contribution to higher education in the United States.

Is that what differentiates Notre Dame from other universities?

That is certainly part of it. Notre Dame strives to be among the superb universities in our nation, while also bringing a distinctive mission that allows it to provide a particularly attractive forum to discuss, for example, the subject of religion across the various disciplines or ethics in the professions, or our responsibility to those in need around the world.

Also, perhaps because the university brings people together to discuss these deeper ethical and spiritual issues, it engenders a sense of commitment and a sense of community that is rarely found elsewhere.

Do you have to be religious to attend Notre Dame?

You do not, but you may not find it an interesting place if you do not respect religious faith and recognize the importance of religion in human history and society. Scholars are increasingly recognizing the powerful influence religious faith has had and continues to have in the lives of individuals and in society.

Because Notre Dame is a place where religion is respected and discussed seriously, we provide a particularly useful forum for discussion of religion.

It seems that students that attend Notre Dame have a special spirit and energy about them. Why is that?

It is a part of the place and always has been. Notre Dame is a place that calls on people and inspires them to reflect on our highest ideals as human beings. What are your most fundamental convictions? What are your obligations to others, particularly those in need? What do you hope for? What are the demands and gifts of love? Some of those are certainly connected to religious faith, but not all are. When you come together as a community around these deeper issues there is, I believe, a deeper bond, a more profound spirit.

This ethos inspires a deeper sense of commitment and involvement by those that are part of it.

How can those who care be of help to the university?

Financial support is absolutely critical. The financial model of higher education is complex but it relies on the generosity of people.

It's also recognizing the critical role of higher education and particularly the role that can speak about issues in morality and religion in an open, unapologetic way. One of our greatest challenges today is an ethical deficit that has undermined some of the most important institutions in our society – financial, political, religious and others. We need to have those conversations.

Another challenge we face is the threat of religious extremism, on one hand, and a secular extremism, on the other. There can be a bias in some circles against religious conviction, which is unfortunate, for we cannot have the conversations we need to have. So I ask people – particularly the leaders who read your magazine – to recognize the distinct and valuable contribution that a place like Notre Dame makes.



What are some areas of focus for Notre Dame that outsiders can support?

Let me count the ways. We all know of the importance of ethics in business, and our Mendoza College of Business has emphasized ethics since before it was fashionable to do so – it’s part of who we are.

The second area is the humanities – philosophy, history, the study of religion across the curriculum. I worry that the emphasis on business and technology sometimes eclipses support for these areas critical to human culture.

In addition, we’re a place that by our mission and the students we attract cares about people, particularly those that are often overlooked – the development of poorer nations that often get lost in the competitive global landscape. We care about technology and ways in which we can provide the government structures, the resources, and the education for those countries. We work in those areas as well as in peace building – we have an important institute for peace studies. Help us help people in greatest need.

However, there are so many other areas – law, science, social science – they are all critical to human understanding and the education of the next generation of leaders.

What programs does the school have in place to help those less fortunate?

Malaria is a disease that kills millions, but the funding for research for it is miniscule, because it mainly afflicts the poor. We do research to develop strategies to try to prevent the spread of malaria. There are various strategies to prevent the ways in which it can be transferred from mosquitos to humans. Our biology department has been invested in that for a long time.

There is a terrible disease in Haiti called Lymphatic Filariasis that can be easily prevented by putting additives in salt. It’s not complicated but it’s serious work – that is another area of focus.

One of the greatest burdens on people is the scourge of war. The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies puts experts on the ground around the world to build structures that support peace.

We have a new initiative with Catholic Charities to research the most effective ways for moving people from unemployment and poverty to productive and fulfilling work.

I could mention many more. These are just a few examples.

What programs do you have in place for fundraising?

In terms of fundraising, it’s simple: do things that matter and tell people what you’re doing and they will want to support you.

Notre Dame, because of its distinct character and mission, can make unique contributions, be it to ethics in business, various aspects of religion and Catholicism, service to people in need, and education of leaders of character – all of those areas are critical.

I believe we can do it in a way that is truly distinctive and makes a special contribution.

You’re an international university?

We send a greater percentage of our undergraduate students on international study programs than almost any other university in the United States. We have programs in London and Rome, Santiago, Chile, and Jerusalem, and in nearly 30 other sites across the globe. We have faculty and scholars on campus from around the world and we hope to add to this number. We are planning for a center or school for international issues. It is an extremely exciting and vibrant time for internationality at Notre Dame.

If Notre Dame is not Vatican-controlled, how is it run?

We have a board of trustees consisting mainly of laypeople, with some priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the religious order that founded Notre Dame. The President of Notre Dame is a Holy Cross priest. In most other respects, we are run very much like most of the other excellent universities in the U.S.

What kind of relationship exists between the Vatican and Notre Dame?

As a Catholic institution, we respect the appropriate role and authority of the Vatican and the Catholic hierarchy generally. We can’t and wouldn’t say that something is Catholic teaching when it isn’t – that’s not our authority, and we certainly want to serve the Catholic Church, as we do in our theology programs, our training of seminarians and lay ministers, our Alliance for Catholic Education program that prepares teachers for Catholic schools, and our collaboration with organizations like Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities.

We are at the same time absolutely committed to academic freedom in areas of scholarly inquiry and discussion.

The document *On Catholic Universities*, issued by Pope John Paul II in 1990, spoke of the importance of a relationship between the university and bishops based on trust, cooperation, and dialogue. This sort of relationship is something we work hard to maintain.

What’s new with God?

There is still a lot of interest. Religious faith continues to play an important role in our lives because it speaks to our deepest convictions in search of meaning – that will never go away. Yet like Jacob in the Biblical story, we often wrestle with the mystery of God and that is a healthy thing.

As head of the university and a priest, do you find it challenging to be an inspiration to others?

One of the great gifts I have is being at a place where I can speak from the depths of who I am and what I believe in the university setting. I don’t have to abstract from or edit out my deepest convictions. I hope living in that way – with all my flaws and shortcomings – can inspire others.

What do you find most enjoyable about your work?

The best thing is meeting interesting young people; it always inspires me. They are full of idealism and energy. Age does bring wisdom and a balance, but young people give you a fresh energy that is always inspiring.

What is your advice for young people?

Be hopeful. There is a temptation to cynicism, to a self-centeredness, and to despair about noble ideals. Do not be afraid to embrace your highest ideals and your deepest inspirations. You will lead a more joyful life insofar as you find ways to share your talents and your energy to serve others.

Do you get discouraged when you see rampant political ill will and increased divisiveness in the country?

I sometimes worry about this nation. We are in a period of deep polarization and great acrimony. Our greatest challenge is the stand-off we face in coming to a resolution on critical issues that are facing this nation. We often seem paralyzed by the divisions among us.

As the leader of a university committed to reason and faith, to knowledge and understanding, and to educating the next generation, this is something I care deeply about – to move us beyond the polarization that so characterizes our society.

What are you most concerned with going forward?

I worry that as a nation we seem to be having great difficulty working together to address and find solutions to the formidable problems that face us. We must allow ourselves, in the words of Lincoln, to be “touched by the better angels of our nature.” At Notre Dame our job is to educate young people – to give them not only the knowledge and skills but also foster the habits and character to address with courage and wisdom the challenges ahead and to work with others. But all of us – business leaders, political leaders, and all leaders in society – must work to transcend divisions and solve the great issues of our day. We owe it to the next generation to give them the opportunities and hope that we had growing up. We must not fail them. ●



Main Building as seen from the top of the Basilica (upper left); University president Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C. chats with students at a picnic in the Joyce Center following the 2011 opening Mass on August 23rd (above)