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### Christ the King Conversation Series

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*Syracuse University*

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# Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud  
Delivered on Thursday, January 8, 2015  
Location: Christ the King Retreat House  
Remarks: Christ the King Conversation Series

*The Chancellor was introduced by Professor of Political Science,  
Grant Reeher*

Thank you, Grant. Good evening, everyone. I am happy to be with you here tonight. I want to thank Jack Mannion for inviting me, and for the Christ the King staff for arranging this opportunity for me to share with you some reflections on what I have learned from Syracuse University.

I am proud to be a native of Upstate New York. I grew up in Irondequoit, a northeastern suburb of Rochester. My father worked at Eastman Kodak, and my mother at Rochester General Hospital.

My twin brother attended medical school here in Syracuse, my other brother was the editor (now retired) of The Daily Messenger in Canandaigua, and my sister worked at St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Utica. So I come from a family that is deeply rooted in Upstate New York.

Tuesday, January 13th, will mark one year since I became Chancellor of Syracuse University, planting my own Syracuse roots.

It is hard to believe it has been one year. I have dedicated much of that time to listening and learning so we can strategize on how we can be a great university that provides the best possible education for our students.

I have walked miles across the Syracuse University campus, traveled from Boston to Los Angeles, to Dubai, meeting thousands of people for whom Syracuse University holds a deep and special place in their hearts.

My wife, Ruth, and I have opened our home to hundreds of Syracuse University employees, from different departments and divisions across campus, to get to know them and so that they can get to know each other.

The members of the Syracuse University community and the greater Syracuse community have been wonderful in welcoming us and helping us acclimate to the rhythm of life at Syracuse.

And in this past year I've learned a very important lesson—People are what make a University great.

Greatness is faculty members such as Bob Wysocki, a professor in the sculpture program, and Jeff Karson, a professor of earth sciences, who collaborated to create The Lava Project.

Bob and Jeff melt Basaltic lava similar to that which erupts from volcanoes in Hawaii and Iceland, and pour it to produce natural-scale lava flows. The project offers unique opportunities for scientific experiments for faculty and students, artistic creations, education and outreach to the greater community.

I have also learned that the lava will continue to flow even while it is snowing!

Greatness is found in the intense passion of our students, for whom Syracuse University provides a “sandbox” to turn their ideas into viable businesses; a laboratory to pursue groundbreaking research; a stage on which to hone their acting skills; or an opportunity to study on the other side of the world.

It's shown in the dedication of each year's cohort of 35 Remembrance Scholars, who remind us of the importance of drawing on the lessons of the past to work towards a better future.

The staff members of Syracuse University, many who have worked for the institution for decades, exemplify greatness. They work with skill, dedication and pride, often behind the scenes.

Delivering a first-class University education requires the skills and talents of many people, and their hard work and initiative reflect a commitment to ensure that our students get the best education possible in the most positive and nurturing environment.

Greatness is found in Syracuse University's hundreds of thousands of alumni, who have made their mark in their respective professions and communities around the world.

And greatness is found in the greater community, from collaborations with the University on cultural and educational opportunities, to the spirit-filled and prideful support for our athletic teams; to the traditions made possible by the Marshall Street business owners, such as savoring a slice of pizza at Varsity.

All of these people are what make the Syracuse experience what it is. And in our journey ahead, as we forge new paths, we can never lose sight of that.

I think that the greatest thing Syracuse University can do for its students, and the greatest contribution it can make to this city and region, is to be a great, thriving and engaged international research university.

We are going to do this through our cutting-edge research and scholarship and by attracting inquisitive, students who are ready to work hard in their pursuit of knowledge, and by attracting world-class faculty who engage our students in unique ways.

These are challenging times for institutions of higher education, for many reasons. But if we are willing to embrace change and think outside the

box in regards to the way we do business, this can also be a time of great possibility and potential.

As we move forward, we will be focusing on four priority areas.

We are going to advance an outstanding student experience at Syracuse University. We will do that by ensuring that students have excellent teachers, innovative research opportunities and all kinds of learning experiences--both in Syracuse and around the world--that quench their thirst for knowledge. We will also work on building the best College of Arts and Sciences--the heart of the liberal arts experience at Syracuse University and home to the largest number of undergraduates--anywhere.

We will invest in interdisciplinary research that targets specific and emerging areas of need, enhancing our standing as a research university that can meet the needs of both the local and global communities and can respond to them.

We will embrace innovation and challenge, and not be afraid to do things that challenge the concept of “business as usual.”

We will also build on the example set by Chancellor William Pearson Tolley in the 1940s of embracing our nation’s veterans who were coming home from World War II and helping them earn their education through the newly implemented GI Bill.

There will be more than 3 million men and women who will be coming out of active military duty in the next few years. We will provide them with a rich array of opportunities to use the leadership and skills they developed so well while serving our nation.

Through our nationally renowned Institute for Veterans and Military Families and other cross-campus initiatives, we will give veterans the tools they need to set bold educational and professional goals for themselves and achieve them in the years to come.

To help us reach our goals in these four areas, we have launched an ambitious strategic initiative called Fast Forward Syracuse. This plan provides a framework for all we will do and identifies students as our primary focus.

Fast Forward Syracuse is a three-pronged initiative that includes:

- A Strategic Plan, centered on academics, which lays out a shared vision for the University and identifies clear priorities and the action steps needed to achieve it.
- A Campus Master Plan, which provides the framework to guide decisions about the University's strategic infrastructure needs; and
- An Operational Excellence Program to help the University be more effective, maximize efficiencies and create opportunities and resources for funding investment in the Strategic Plan and Campus Master Plan.

Development of all three components of Fast Forward Syracuse is under way, but its implementation will be a multi-year process. We are looking at a number of issues that affect our future, including enrollment numbers.

Our overarching goal in all of this work is to position Syracuse University strongly as an innovator and leader among its peers in advancing excellence and assuring successful outcomes for our students while remaining true to who we are and building on where we have been.

Taking advantage of emerging opportunities and becoming stronger is a good thing for Syracuse University, and serves the best interests of this community and the entire region.

This year was one of many firsts for Ruth and me, as we welcomed our first grandchild, our granddaughter Clara, in October. Like any first-time grandparents, we can't get enough of her. When I hold her, and look at

her, I see endless possibilities for her future. That's what I see for our students too, and that is what I am dedicated to working towards, with the help of the many people who define the Syracuse experience.

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