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Remembrance Scholar Convocation

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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on October 28, 2016

Location: Wall of Remembrance

Remarks: Remembrance Scholar Convocation

*The Chancellor was introduced by Pat Burak,
Director of International Students Office*

Thank you and welcome all to Syracuse University.

This day, and this week, are times for remembering and for celebrating.

An unbearable crime of violence and cruelty inflicted pain and loss on so many here in Syracuse, in Scotland, and around the world.

We remember the men and women we lost. But we also celebrate the resurrection of their dreams and hopes and best qualities. That miracle occurs through the Remembrance Scholars, through the Lockerbie Scholars, and through all those who have worked all year to lift up all that was good and true and virtuous in those we lost. That miracle occurs when we pay forward hope through all that is good and true and virtuous in our current students and community. I celebrate this today.

I thank everyone who has played a role in turning this tragedy into a force for good as well as for remembrance.

- I thank the 35 Remembrance and 2 Lockerbie Scholars;
- I thank their advisors Kate Hanson, Kelly Rodoski, Vanessa St. Oegger-Menn, and the incomparable Judy O'Rourke; and
- I thank all those who have worked on this week's Remembrance activities, including the planning group and, from Hendricks Chapel, Interim Dean Sam Clemence and Michelle Larrabee.

I extend greetings and thanks on behalf of our entire community to our distinguished guests from Scotland, from the United States Department of Justice, and from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

When Pan Am 103 was bombed above the village of Lockerbie 28 years ago; when 270 human beings died on the plane and on the ground; when 35 returning Syracuse students had their future cut short; the Chancellor of Syracuse University was Melvin Eggers.

Chancellor Eggers was a good man who had given his all for this University for many years. People tell me, people who are in this chapel today have told me, that Chancellor Eggers was almost broken by the heartache of this loss, and that in some ways he was never the same again.

He attended every funeral; he shook the hand and hugged the loved ones of every student; he helped organize a massive service in the Carrier Dome. And I am told, he felt exhausted and bereft.

I have been Chancellor here now for almost three years. Through a glass darkly, I now perceive a small part of the challenge Chancellor Eggers bore.

This is a large university, with more than 20,000 students, 5,000 faculty and staff, and countless thousands of others from our community who help in myriad ways to lift us up and define us. The demographics of more than 30,000 people in our community are relentless; every semester, we lose a student, a faculty member, a staff member, a friend. Sometimes it is an accident, sometimes disease, and sometimes a despicable crime of violence.

Every time it happens to one of us, as steward of Syracuse University, I feel bereft and diminished. I ask why. I ask what I could have done; what we could have done. It is hard. Chancellor Eggers dealt with the loss of 35 students at one time. Of course he was almost broken. Who would not be.

And yet, this is Syracuse. He stood up. He asked for help. He asked this community, including a group of people, some of whom are here today, to figure out a way to remember better, to bring good from this evil, to uniquely celebrate and build something better from this tragedy. He did not order a plaque, he asked us all to help create something better.

And it happened. It is 28 years later.

Each year has brought a new wave of students with their hopes and dreams. Each year faculty and staff and chancellors have come and gone. Each year brings new fads and new ideas and yes, new outrages of violence in the world. And yet, despite all the new people and the new distractions, we here never forget those who were lost over and in Lockerbie.

We never forget because of Remembrance week, because of those chairs and those roses. We never forget because, most importantly, each student on that plane is represented each year by a wonderful current student, who celebrates the best of what was lost in that man or woman, and who pays it forward.

I grew up in Upstate New York, in a Scottish Presbyterian Church with a Scottish Pastor. His favorite hymn was O God Our Help in Ages Past. I sang in the choir. The fourth verse of that hymn went as follows, quoting Psalm 90:

Time like an ever rolling stream

Bears all its sons away

They fly forgotten as a dream

Dies at the break of day.

I quoted that passage at this convocation two years ago. As a young person in the choir, I found that passage deeply sad. Our sons and daughters die forgotten like a dream dies, it seemed to say. How could I reconcile that with the gospel notion that not a sparrow falls from the sky without God knowing it, and presumably remembering. [Matthew 29:10]

Since two years ago, I have thought a lot about that, and I have as Chancellor seen us lose students, including this semester Vinny Maugeri and Xiaopeng Pippen Yuan. I have realized that I was wrong in understanding Psalm 90.

Our sons and daughters do not die forgotten like a dream. Dreams don't die unless we let them. Dreams can live on for 28 years, and decades longer, if those of us who remain and those of us who come after are willing to remember and to live up to those dreams. That is what we have asked of our Remembrance and Lockerbie Scholars, and that is what, year in and year out, you have delivered.

For this I thank you.

And I also pose a challenge to this community, inspired by what Chancellor Eggers and this community did after Lockerbie. How can we remember well our students and community members who we lose each year?

Maybe each spring, when the world is young and new, we can somehow learn from Remembrance week and the miracle that has been wrought by all of you, and remember and pay forward great people like Vinny Maugeri and Phippen Yuan in some way. I would like to ask your help in thinking about that, and to think about, how under the auspices of Hendricks Chapel, the heart of this campus, we could celebrate the souls of those we lose each year.

I conclude by honoring all those who have made Remembrance Week, and Remembrance scholarships possible.

- The families of those lost on Pan Am Flight 103;
- The Lockerbie Trust;
- The faculty and staff who mentor our students; and
- The generous donors, including Dick and Jean Thompson and Steve and Deborah Barnes, who are committed to keeping this program strong

I thank of all of you for this day of remembrance and of celebration of the good.

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