

Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on November 7, 2017

Location: Hendricks Chapel

Remarks: Installation of the 7th Dean of Hendricks Chapel, Reverend Brian Konkol

*The Chancellor introduced by Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff,
Candace Campbell Jackson.*

Thank you, Candace. Welcome all to the heart and soul of Syracuse University.

I am so grateful that all of you are here today – students, faculty, staff, members of the board of trustees, religious leaders, and community members. I am grateful that all of you here have come together to honor Hendricks Chapel and its new dean.

I have three short messages today, and one gift to present.

The first message is of thanks to the Hendricks Chapel Review Committee and its members, and to the Hendricks Chapel Dean Search Committee and its members, for helping this university form a vision and recruit a great dean. The Committees were chaired by Candace Campbell Jackson and Professor Sam Clemence, who also served for two years as interim Dean of Hendricks Chapel. I believe Hendricks Chapel is in good shape and has a promising future because of the leadership of Candace and Sam. I ask that we all thank them now.

My second message is a harder one to share.

I have taught and served on many great university campuses, both public and private. On one of them, a great private university, there is a beautiful gothic chapel at the center of its campus, complete with a beautiful organ,

seating for many hundreds of people, and remarkable acoustics. That chapel today is a building, an event space, a really nice venue for a concert, a lecture, and occasionally for a fundraising rally.

There is little staff, no dean, and almost no religious or spiritual life in it. And there are some at that university who are comfortable with this. They view the tension between faith and reason as a negative at a great university, and they prefer that faith migrate underground to the margins on the outskirts of the campus. Some indeed would prefer that religious faith atrophy away, as some critics claim it is doing in the mainline protestant churches that founded so many great universities, including this one.

There are some on this campus who feel the same way. I respect them, and in particular I respect the clear-eyed pursuit of truth that often animates their views.

But my hard message is this: The vision of the Review Committee, and the search committee for the Dean, is not that vision. Their goal is not to emulate the Shakers, to pursue a narrow purist vision of religious and spiritual life that in the end includes very few, and leaves behind only a beautiful building, some songs, and some furniture. Their goal is to keep Hendricks Chapel as the vibrant and dynamic center of religious and spiritual life on this campus by embracing our students where they are, by recognizing what they need, and by serving them and thereby the entire community to which they can contribute.

This means that the role of Hendricks Chapel is not to exclude students but to embrace them, not to impose one orthodoxy but to respect devout faith and spirituality in all faith traditions, including as they evolve. This means that, in this house of prayer for all people, all are welcome, including those with whom we might disagree on issues of faith, spirituality, politics, or reason. This means that it does matter how many students Hendricks Chapel serves, and it does matter whether, like the

words of the gospel on this ceiling, our Dean and chaplains are helping many students to find their way to know the truth, so that it may set them free.

My third message is that Brian Konkol is the right dean to pursue the vision of the Review Committee and to continue the historic mission of this Chapel. I am so grateful to Brian and to his whole family for supporting him in answering this call. To hear Brian preach, to see him interact with people of all faiths and no faith, to watch him lead, is truly a revelation. I believe that if all the deans of Hendricks Chapel, living and dead, and all the Chancellors, could be here today – a cloud of witnesses – they would stand up and cheer at the leader we are installing today. He is animated by his faith. He lives his values every day. He is a patient, determined, and effective master of outreach and of community. Dean Konkol will reach so many here, in so many ways, by going to them rather than by expecting them to come to him.

I am therefore pleased today to confirm that Dean Konkol, like the first five deans of Hendricks Chapel, will report directly to the Chancellor at Syracuse University, and, like all six of his predecessors, will serve as a key leader on this campus.

So. What do we give such a dean, the first Lutheran to lead in this role? After a lot of thought, and some good counsel from our talented professional librarians and from Dean Luke Powery of Duke University Chapel, we have selected this book. Five Hundred Years ago this month, there was another about to be Lutheran pastor, the first Lutheran pastor, who believed that ideas should be discussed and uncomfortable truths debated, and that they should be accessible not just to a small set of the hierarchy, but to the people. He translated the Bible from Latin into the vernacular, the language of the common people, in his case, German. He started the reformation. He was, of course, Martin Luther. And this is his Bible, at least about the most famous of its editions, the 1725 Nurnberg

Bible, with many woodcut drawings and a famous copperplate portrait of Luther in it.

Dean Konkol, I don't think we are looking for another reformation here. But we are looking for a flowering of both faith and reason in these polarized times. With this gift from your own faith, we are embracing you and your belief that we should embrace others and give them the freedom to embrace their own faith and beliefs, and that we should learn from each other. It's a heavy book for a heavy responsibility. You are up to it. Congratulations.

Thank you.

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