

# dean kearney's remarks at the 24th annual st. ignatius law luncheon

*On March 11, 2005, Dean Joseph D. Kearney received the annual Award of Excellence in the Field of Law from St. Ignatius College Prep, the high school that he attended in Chicago. In receiving the award from Rev. Brian Paulson, S.J., the president of the school, Dean Kearney delivered the following remarks at a luncheon ceremony at the Chicago Athletic Association. We reprint them here because they touch upon teaching, the Jesuit tradition in education, and the law—matters of interest, to be sure, to Marquette University Law School.*

Thank you, Father Paulson. Thank you especially for reminding me that I never won the IHSA state Latin contest (or at least for letting me know in advance that you would be referring to this). Your sources are good, but the matter is even worse than you report. My freshman year, I finished one point behind my classmate and friend, Peter Nolan (290 to his 291). There was a 60-question matching section, and after 58 of them, it came down to the Pantheon and the Parthenon. Who knew which was the temple to all the gods in Rome and which the temple to Athena on the Acropolis in Athens? Not I, apparently. That was even worse than the next three years, in which I finished an increasingly distant second to someone (a phenomenon, surely) from Marquette High School in Ottawa, Illinois.

I do have a few other thank yous, and I hope as well that you will indulge me a brief reflection on St. Ignatius. I wish to thank Chiara Wrocinski for her work in putting today's event together, and to the members of the committee that put me forward for this award. I am grateful for the honor. My gratitude to my wife, Anne, a

lawyer herself and my closest counselor, cannot be adequately expressed.

The other thank yous get me into my reflection concerning St. Ignatius. I almost opted for a private school on the South Side of Chicago, Morgan Park Academy, instead of Ignatius for high school. Choosing Ignatius—and being permitted to do so by my late mother and by my father, who is here today, and they were scarcely modern as a general matter in terms of the amount of control they ceded to their children—had a more important effect on my educational and professional future than any other decision that I have ever made.

This is primarily because I had extraordinary teachers at St. Ignatius. The late Patrick J. O'Mara, who ran the bookstore and taught geometry in an incomparable way, was one. Donald Hoffman and Frank Raispis, both of whom are here today (and for which I am grateful), were two others.

I surprised—maybe even astonished—some colleagues at Marquette Law School a few years ago when I taught an extra course, without compensation, because some students wanted to take it and only I could teach that particular course. For myself, I thought that that was just what one did in those circumstances.

Had not Mr. Hoffman taught me Latin, as an independent study, three days a week after school as a freshman, so that I could go the two-language route that Father Paulson described, and was not Mr. Raispis doing the same thing with my brother, Edmund, during his senior year? (Was it not in the great Jesuit tradition of fostering competition when Mr. Hoffman would go into the regular first-year class and say, "We're on Chapter 20—oh, no, wait that's

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Kearney—we're on Chapter 18"? You may be sure that he did precisely the opposite with me.) Did not Mr. Hoffman readily accede to the request of a number of us during our junior year

that he put together an extra course on Latin lyric poetry and during our senior year on the Confessions of St. Augustine? Was this all not an embodiment of what Mr. Raispis taught us in Greek, which we started as sophomores, when we learned that Achilles' father, Peleus, told Achilles (in Book XI of the *Iliad*) his goal should be “*ὄλεν ὀριστευειν*”—always to be the best?

I constantly aspire, no doubt with mixed results at most, to the teaching abilities possessed by the O'Maras, Hoffmans, and Raispises of the world, and the Edmund and Mary Jane Kearneys. So many of my Ignatius teachers had internalized the lesson that my mother, a teacher, learned in 1953 at Academy of Our Lady, when she was told by a seasoned teacher, “My dear, haven't you realized that it is *you* they are studying most?”

We studied our teachers, and I admired them, even while in high school. I ran a story in the newspaper for open house one year about all the dedicated teachers. I thought it necessary to add the somewhat gratuitous comment that “no school is great because of its administration.” This prompted the principal at the time to call me on the carpet, in a fairly dramatic way. Now that I am an administrator as well as a teacher, and now that Father Paulson as Ignatius's leader and administrator has honored me with this award, I may have to rethink my uninformed and regrettable statement about administrators not making schools great.

Ignatius gave me so many things beyond a basic education. It gave me Chicago. My original intent for today was that I might trace out the various ways that I found my way to or from school—from the school bus, to the 49a and 49 Western Avenue buses and the 60 bus on Blue Island Avenue, to the 22 Clark Street bus and the Dan Ryan L, to thumbing a ride on Western Avenue, and so on. These journeys are all the more memorable to me for my having made many of them with my brother Edmund, three years ahead of me (Class of 1979), who is here today, and my brother Robert, two years behind me (Class of 1984), who would have liked to be here. But to mention all the routes would take all the time I have been allotted.

Ignatius gave me Chicago in other ways. For every Mike McGovern (here today, and now Father McGovern) in Beverly, there was a Peter Hallan (in Austin), a Peter Nolan (in Rogers Park), and six others from all other parts the city (and a few from the suburbs, including Kate Evert, daughter of Ed Evert, Class of 1957, who is here today—Kate came in every day all the way from Geneva). The school was a magnet school in terms of geography and demography in a way, I believe, that few schools, even public schools, approached.

Ignatius gave me a sense of responsibility. I will not overstate the matter, as I would not wish to give some misimpression that I have been invariably responsible over the years. But the way that it treated the young men there—and after my freshman year the young women as well—was considerably more grown-up than many high schools. (The mere fact of open periods rather than study halls is sufficient testimony.) There were mistakes along the way, on all sides, but it left a lasting impression.

Perhaps most broadly, Ignatius made me part of the Catholic and Jesuit educational tradition. Having attended a secular grade school, college, and law

school, I tasted less of it than perhaps some of you. But Ignatius grounded me in the tradition. It is not merely the connection that it gave me to Judge O’Scannlain and Justice Scalia even before interviewing with them for clerkships (or to Father Wild, to whom for some reason I felt it necessary to point out, the day that I was interviewing for the deanship, that I was wearing a maroon-and-gold tie, in case this Ignatius graduate and very intelligent President of Marquette University might miss the point). It is also (and particularly) the sense of belonging to a tradition that requires both academic excellence and substantive values. Indeed, if I might be permitted a Jesuitical phrase (and I think today that I might be), the Jesuit tradition places *primary* emphasis on *both* academic excellence *and* larger values.

Requiring both, yielding on neither—this is the great insistence of Jesuit education. It seems to me especially important to make that insistence at a Jesuit law school. I need not tell this group about how the law is a remarkable combination, in that it is both a learned profession and a helping profession. Lawyers have a special claim that they are fulfilling the Jesuit mission of being *homines pro aliis*—men and women for others. After all, our very reason for being is to seek justice for our clients. Just as it is a privilege to be part of the Jesuit educational tradition, so too do I find it humbling to be part of a profession capable of doing so much good. And to combine both to help produce Marquette lawyers is truly a privilege for me.

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In short, I am proud to be part of the Catholic and Jesuit educational tradition in Chicago and in America, which has served so well Catholic immigrants and us, their descendants. I am descended from eight great-grandparents who all came over from Ireland; I hope that my children, Michael, Stephen, and Thomas, one way or another will feel themselves part of this tradition. Michael, who at six years old is with me today, is named after his great, great-grandfather, Michael Dinneen, who emigrated from Ireland, was a cooper in the stockyards on the South Side here, and died in December 1917 (but nonetheless had the advantage over my father, brothers, and me of seeing the White Sox win a World Series\*). Perhaps my son will not remember this particular

event (though, knowing Michael, perhaps he will). But I wish him to have, as I have liked to say over the years, an “immigrant’s mentality.” By this I mean not the sense of an outsider—I myself have never felt truly an outsider in any institution in which I have found myself for any substantial period—but an interest in learning and a sense of a lack of entitlement.

That is my view, I hope generally, but certainly of this award. I am not entitled to it. But I am grateful for it. Thank you. •

\* *Editor’s Note: This statement was accurate when made. In light of the 2005 World Series, the Dean has never been happier to confess error.*